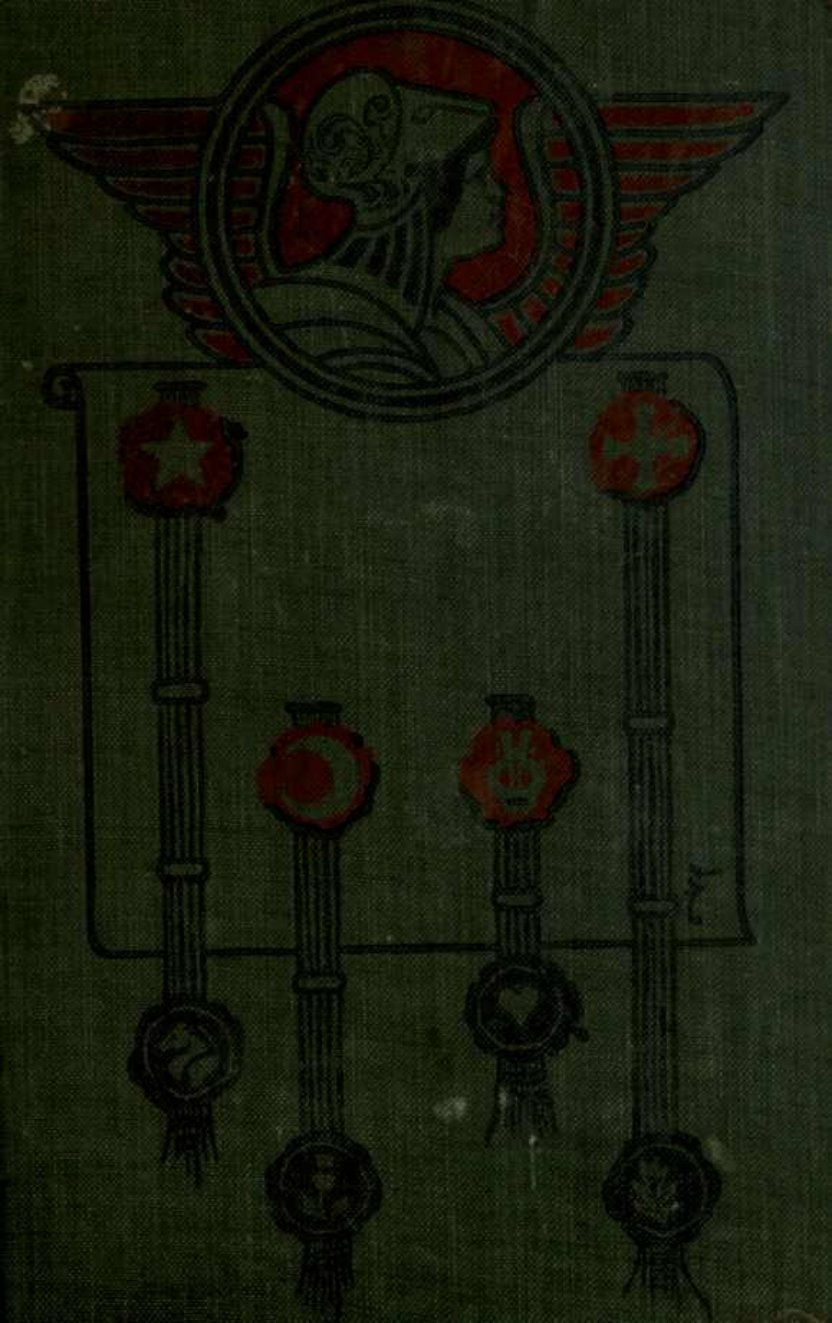

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WEAKER THAN A WOMAN

BY

BERTHA M. CLAY, pseud.

AUTHOR OF

"DORA THORNE," "THE EARLE'S ATONEMENT," "FOILED BY LOVING," ETC., ETC.

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WEAKER THAN A WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE LEGACY.

"It is true, Kate—every word of it. I was, like you, incredulous at first; but I heard the will read, and I assure you that Mrs. Hardman has left me six thousand pounds."

"I cannot believe it, Darcy. See how my hands tremble. I have hardly the strength to speak. It is impossible. Six thousand pounds! Oh, Darcy, if there should be any mistake, let me know it at once, before I begin to found any hopes upon such good fortune—before I take it into my heart of hearts as a truth."

"My dear Kate, there is no mistake—there can be no mistake. I should not have told you had there been the least probability of such a thing. The money is our own, and will be paid to us when the estate is settled."

"Six thousand pounds! Why, Darcy, that means three hundred a year, does it not?"

"Certainly," replied Darcy Lonsdale, "properly invested."

"And three hundred a year means freedom from anxiety, from the constant toil of trying to make both ends meet. It means a larger and better house, a governess for the children. Oh, Darcy, how can we be thankful enough?"

"My dear Kate," said the lawyer, simply, "I assure you that for some time after I had heard it I did not know how I felt. The most pleasant part of it was coming home to tell you. I knew how delighted you would be."

"Have you told Felix?" asked the anxious wife.

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"No; I have not seen him yet. He is gone over to Nuncombe. He will be pleased. I can take him into partnership now, which is a thing that I have long wished to do. We have had a hard struggle together, Kate, but it is almost over now. I should not have believed that money could make such a difference in any one's sensations. Yesterday I felt that the world was my master; to-day I feel that I have mastered the world."

"We shall be able to go to the sea-side now, and you can take a rest occasionally; and we can get some good port wine for little Nellie."

The lawyer smiled.

"And my bonnie Kate shall have a superb dress," he said, "one that shall make her look young and beautiful to others as she does to me. In truth, Kate, I see no end to the relief, the ease, the happiness, that this unlooked for legacy gives us."

"We must take Vale House; it is to be let," remarked Mrs. Lonsdale. "It is just such a house as I always longed for; it is so large, so convenient, and has a much better drawing-room than that of the Mertons. What do you think, Darcy?"

"Yes; I think we might take Vale House. I will go out to-day, and inquire about the rent, rates, and taxes."

"What will Mrs. Merton say?" mused Mrs. Lonsdale.

"Never mind about that," replied the lawyer. "All that we have to do is to enjoy our good fortune. I really do not know, but I think that such a sum of money never made people so happy before. Kiss me, Kate, and we will not forget to thank Heaven together."

The speakers were Darcy Lonsdale and his wife. Darcy Lonsdale was the principal lawyer in the clean and well-built town of Lilford in Loomshire—a man who had had a hard hand-to-hand struggle with the world. He had been twice married. His first wife died in her twentieth year, leaving an only son, Felix; and ten years afterward the lawyer married again. His second wife was a blithe, bonnie, rosy girl who loved him with all her heart, and thought no one in the wide world so clever, so great, or so good. For his sake she took little Felix to her heart, and loved the dark-haired, handsome boy as much as she did her own children. The lawyer's one drawback was his large family; nearly every year a pretty, rosy, smiling baby appeared, until, as he pleasantly declared, he had ceased to count them, for their number frightened him. The "small army" he called them; and, though he was

proud of them and fond of them, though he would not have missed one fair head from the circle for the whole world, yet the number told upon him—he could not save money, he could not even buy a house, his ingenuity was taxed to make both ends meet. The bills were so numerous—little feet must be shod, little fair heads must be covered, little minds trained; and nothing could be done without money. Still Darcy Lonsdale was a very happy man; he had a charming wife, beautiful children, a good practice, and he liked work. The one pride of his life was his tall, handsome son, Felix, in whom the honest, simple-hearted lawyer had concentrated all his hopes and ambition. The "small army" were all under twelve, so that he could not build any hopes on them at present.

His life had on the whole been a pleasant one; but he did wish at times that he had a little more money. His practice was a good one; still it could hardly be called lucrative in the small pleasant town of Lilford. There was not much to occupy a lawyer; the setting forth and renewal of leases, the drawing up of title deeds, the making of wills, the framing of agreements, composed the whole of his business.

Among his clients was an eccentric widow lady, named Martha Hardman, and Darcy Lonsdale had for twenty years been her faithful friend, adviser, and guide. She said to him, laughingly, one day:

"You will have something to thank me for when I am dead."

"How can I thank you when you are dead?" he asked.

She nodded her head gravely.

"You will see," she replied. "You have done everything for me since you began to practice; but I shall not let you make my will. Tell me whom you would advise me to send for to do so."

Thinking that she was in a capricious mood, he answered:

"Send for George Malcolm; he is an honest lawyer and an honest man. But why not let me make your will, Mrs. Hardman?"

"Because I am going to leave you something in it; and I have not read of the glorious uncertainties of the English law for so many years without wishing to be on the safe side. I may fail, but I will take all reasonable precautions."

He laughed at the time, giving little heed to what she said, and soon afterward he forgot all about the incident.

Three years later Mrs. Hardman died, and her nephew, her heir-at-law, came upon the scene. Darcy Lonsdale had all her papers, an exact list of all her moneys, her deeds, leases, documents of various kinds—but he had no will.

"Did she make a will?" asked the heir-at-law.

"I cannot tell," replied Darcy Lonsdale. "I have certainly drawn up no will for her."

"Has she ever mentioned a will?" pursued James Hardman.

Suddenly the lawyer remembered that she had mentioned a will, and his face flushed as he thought of the conversation. James Hardman looked at him suspiciously.

"She did speak of her will to me once; she told me that I should not draw it up for her, and asked me to name some lawyer. I told her that George Malcolm was an honest lawyer and an honest man; but I never heard whether she sent for him or not."

"You know, of course, of what her property consists, and that I am her heir-at-law."

"Yes," was the cheerful reply; "we have often talked about you. I can give you the particulars of the late Mrs. Hardman's property. She owned the estate called Woodburn, consisting of a large farm and a good substantial house; and she had, besides this, twelve thousand pounds in the Funds."

"And that is, of course, mine?" said James Hardman.

"I know nothing as to that," replied Darcy Lonsdale. "I did not make her will, nor did she ever ask my advice about it."

After the funeral George Malcolm came with the will and the instructions that he had received from Mrs. Hardman. It was read aloud; and then it was discovered that the lady had left Woodburn and six thousand pounds to her nephew, James Hardman, while to her true friend and adviser, Darcy Lonsdale, in acknowledgment of his long friendship and faithful services, she had bequeathed the sum of six thousand pounds.

On hearing that the lawyer hurried home, delighted with the intelligence, to his wife. What a vista of comfort this legacy opened out to them! For the first time in his long honorable career the lawyer felt some relief—he could meet his expenses now, and when he died there would be something for his wife and children.

Nor was his wife less delighted. In her heart she had longed for the same luxuries that the wives of other professional men enjoyed—for a drawing-room like Mrs. Mer

ton's, for a nursery governess such as the doctor's wife, Mrs. Dalverley, had engaged, for a silk dress like the one that the rector's wife wore. But of these desires she had never spoken. She knew that her husband did his best in every possible way, and gave her all the money that he could. But now she ventured for the first time to indulge in such blissful reveries. They were no longer idle dreams; they would be realized. She would live in Vale House, that delightful residence—she would have a charming drawing-room, a nursery governess, and a costly silk dress.

While she sat dreaming with a smile on her face her step-son, Felix, entered the room. There was the warmest attachment between these two—kindly liking and respect for his step-mother on his part, the highest admiration and the truest love for a step-son on hers. She was so young when Darcy Lonsdale brought her to the great white square house in Castle street, Lilford, that it seemed absurd for Felix to call her mother. As he grew older it appeared to him that, with her soft Italian beauty, the most suitable title for her was *madre.* He looked at her now.

"*Madre,*" he said, "you are looking very pleased and bright; what is the good news?"

Mrs. Lonsdale went up to him and clasped her arms round his neck. She drew the handsome face down to hers.

"Kiss me, Felix," she said; "I have news to tell you—the best you have ever heard. I know you will be pleased—indeed the very thought of the news makes me tremble with joy. You could never guess it, Felix."

"I suppose I never could. Have any of the 'small fry' distinguished themselves?"

"No; it is nothing of that kind. It is this. You remember Mrs. Hardman, of Woodburn?"

"I should remember her, *madre;* some of the dreariest hours of my life have been spent in copying deeds bearing her name."

"My dear Felix, her name must be held blessed among us for evermore. She has left your father a legacy of six thousand pounds—and to us, my dear, that means so much. It means Vale House to live in, a governess for the children, and a partnership for you."

His handsome face flushed hotly.

"And that, *madre*—that means for me Violet Haye."

A tender light came into Kate Lonsdale's clear eyes.

"I hope so," she said, gently; "I shall be so pleased if it is so. Now, Felix, people call money dross. Could you

or I estimate the amount of happiness that lies in six thousand pounds?"

"I value it because it will give me Violet," declared the ardent young lover.

"And I because it will give me every desire of my heart," said Mrs. Lonsdale. "And, above all, it will give your dear father a little rest."

CHAPTER II.

WOOING VIOLET HAYE.

Violet Haye! There is something in a name. More than one man murmured this one over and over again, wondering to himself what sweet magic, what wonderful sorcery lay in it. Violet Haye—the very sound evoked a vision so beautiful, so full of witching grace, so dainty, so delightful, that dwelling on it proved too much for minds and brains not overstrung. What had not Violet Haye to answer for? How many prosperous young farmers had wasted the best hours of the summer days while the hay spoiled in the meadows and the corn grew over-ripe in the fields, watching in Castle street, or waiting in the green lanes, for one glance at the peerless face of Violet Haye? The young doctor, who had bought the old physician's practice had almost gone mad for love of her; and when she told him, with a sweet, bright smile, that she disliked medicine and everything connected with it, in pique and despair he married a prim little old maid who had ceased for fifteen years to dream of a wedding-ring. Young curates came, saw, and were comquered; but beautiful Violet resolutely refused to help any parish work—she would have nothing to do with the schools. One after another the curates went away, with a bitter memory of one of the lovelist girls in Loomshire. The young tradesmen of the place had never dared to lift their eyes to her, for she belonged to the class known in Lilford as the gentry; but when by chance Violet Haye did enter a shop the master of it had need of patience during the next twenty-four hours, for Violet Haye was a most beautiful girl, and reigned queen of the country round Lilford.

There was a wonderful charm about the girl. It was not simply for the sheen of her golden hair, for the wonderful light of her violet eyes, the exquisite tints of her face, the beauty of her rosebud mouth, that men loved her so; it was

not that she was tall and slender, with a perfect figure; it was not that she had white hands that wove wondrous spells, that she moved with grace that was all harmony, that she spoke with a voice sweeter than sweet music; that, when she laughed, the silvery chime stirred a man's heart like the sound of silver bells; it was not for this that men loved her. She was not a flirt, not a coquette—she never, by word or looks, made any man believe that she loved him; but she could no more have helped the way she had of charming men than she could have helped living. She was the only child of Francis and Margaret Haye, who lived in a pretty villa called the Limes, on the outskirts of Lilford. By kind indulgence the Hayes were permitted to rank with the gentry. They were not poor, they were not professionals; they were not in trade. Francis Haye had an income that kept his family in comfort, but it would cease at his death. He had insured his life for the benefit of his wife and child, and the money that would come to them from that insurance was all that he had to leave them; still they belonged to the gentry. It was not a numerous class in Lilford, and was by no means to be identified with county society; that was a far-off and greater glory—a world that even beautiful Violet with her Greuze-like face had never hoped to enter. The gentry comprised old Colonel Maddox and his lady; Mrs. Brownson, a widow lady with a daughter of uncertain age; the late rector's widow, Mrs. Boulders; a maiden lady, Miss Stanley, the pride of whose life was that her second cousin had married a baronet, and who, in consequence, piqued herself on her high connections, and talked in a similar way of the aristocracy; and a few others of the same caliber. It was not a brilliant circle but to Violet Haye it was a world.

If, of her numerous lovers she preferred one, it was Felix Lonsdale. It was an old story. He had certainly been her lover from the early age of seven. He had never thought of any one else; to him and for him the world was all Violet. In the sun's rays shone Violet; the birds sang "Violet;" no sweet flower bloomed that was as sweet as she. He had lived with this one thought; he had studied, worked, toiled—all for Violet, hoping that the day would come when he would be able to marry her. He had devoted his life to this one object.

Darcy Lonsdale had contrived to send his son to Oxford and at Oxford he had distinguished himself as a scholar of no mean abilities; after that he had passed some time in London; and now he was with his father, sharing his

labors and toils, and working hard, hoping one day to secure a partnership, and then to marry Violet. He had once thought of leaving Lilford; he felt that the place was but small, the circle of interests limited. Then he put aside the thought as a temptation; he mustn't desert his father or leave his business to the hands of strangers. There was something almost heroic in the way in which he looked round upon the great bright glittering world, with its magnificent battle-fields of skill and intellect, its great arenas where mind and brain fought mind and brain, and then said to himself, "No, my duty lies at home, and I will work there."

He was singularly gifted, this young Englishman, who was brave enough to make duty his guide. People often looked at him in wonder, asking themselves whence had come his clear-cut face—a face of the purest type, with dark clustering hair that waved back from a low, broad brow—his beautiful mouth, that could be rigid and firm, yet often wore a smile as sweet as a woman's, the dark eyes that were as true and eloquent as the soul they revealed. It was a poetical face, yet combining with the intellectual and the ideal something of the practical keenness of a clever man.

Darcy Lonsdale formed great hopes for his son; he had rightly estimated his abilities, and he had said to himself that in time the best business of the county would be brought to him. He himself was industrious, honest, and in some degree a good lawyer; but his son was a genius, and the father told himself with a sigh that in these days a touch of genius was needed before one could make a mark in the world.

As boy, youth, and man, Felix had loved Violet Haye —to win her, to make her his wife, had been the one dream of his life. He had had no other; and it was equally certain that up to the present time his love had brought him far more pain than pleasure, far more torment than rest, far more strife than peace. He could never tell whether beautiful Violet cared for him or not—all the country-side knew that he loved her. It seemed to him that the very birds in the trees and the flowers in the hedges knew that. It had never been a secret; but he could not guess whether she cared for him. If ever he felt hopeful and augured much from a kinder word or a sweeter smile than usual, the next time she saw him Violet would be cold. She was so proud that he could hardly extort a word from her; and

yet he had a dim, a faint conviction, that she preferred hm to any other.

Now was his opportunity. He was already making a fair income by writing reviews and essays. If his father took him into partnership, his share, though perhaps small at first, would be certain, and would increase. Now was his opportunity; he would delay no longer, but would at once ask Violet Haye to be his wife.

"It seems almost too good to be true," he thought to himself, "that I should succeed in my profession, that I should win the girl I love for my wife, that I should be happy and blessed. What have I done to deserve it?" He looked up to the sunlit skies. "Done," he repeated—"I have done nothing. It is the goodness of Heaven that has given it to me. Heaven grants all to industry," he thought, "and while I work I need not fear."

In that hour no thought came to him of the storm-clouds that darken men's lives—of the terrible tempests that rend heart and brain—of the despair that looks for death as a relief. He saw only the blue sky and the golden sunshine.

He saw nothing but the beauty of the fair earth and the laughing sky when he went to woo beautiful Violet Haye and ask her to be his wife. He had been waiting only until he saw a prospect clear and bright before him. Francis Haye might have objected to a man with an uncertain future; Francis Haye would not object to the junior partner of the old-established house of Lonsdale. He was only twenty-four, and, after selecting a very choice flower for his coat, was to be forgiven, if he looked once at his clear-cut face and dark mustache. As he quitted his father's house on that lovely summer afternoon there was perhaps not a handsomer, truer, more noble, or gallant young lover in all broad England than Felix Lonsdale.

"Wish me good fortune, *madre*," he said, bending to kiss Kate Lonsdale's lovely face—"I am going to the Limes."

Kate looked up with a smile. She made no answer. She kissed him as his own mother would have done, and watched him as he walked down the street.

"There is no need to wish him good fortune," she said to herself; "the girl does not live who would say 'No' to him.

As she went through her round of duties, Mrs. Lonsdale thought often and anxiously that she would like to know how Felix was speeding in his wooing.

CHAPTER III.

"I HAVE NOT QUITE PROMISED."

It was a glorious afternoon. The country about Lilford was beautiful in the extreme, with lovely undulating meadows, great chain of green hills that stretched into the far distance, dark shady woods with some of the finest trees in England, lovely green lanes where wild flowers raised their bright heads. The town itself was quaint and picturesque; the pretty old-fashioned houses were almost buried in foliage. The one long main street of the town—Castle street—might have been a Parisian boulevard, it was so regularly planted with trees.

This afternoon seemed to Felix Lonsdale one of the finest that he ever remembered. He walked through the clover meadows, his heart singing for joy, snatches of song rising to his lips. The hedges were all pink and white with hawthorn, long sprays of woodbine twined round the rugged trunks of the tall trees, the clover was thick and odorous. He crossed the path at the end of Oakwoods, where he saw most glorious vistas of light and shade, entered a long green lane, and then he reached the fair green fields that led to the Limes, the home of his love.

Presently he saw Violet Haye. He gazed at her in mute wonder that earth should hold anything so fair. She carried a little basket filled with flowers, and on her golden head she wore a simple garden hat. Her dress seemed to him a wonderful combination of white and blue. A feeling of humility came over him—who was he that he should hope to win this brilliant young beauty and make her his own? Then his pride reasserted itself; his love ennobled him; he could hope to win her because he loved her so dearly. Violet did not see him. She was walking in the other direction, and he hastened after her.

It was no wonder that he loved her; the smiles with which she greeted him would have turned many a wiser brain than his.

"Felix," she cried, "I did not dream of seeing you."

"And seeing you, Violet, is like a dream," he replied, "and after I have left you I think of a hundred things that I wanted to say to you, and meant to say, and yet forgot."

"That proves that you have a bad memory, Felix,"

laughed Violet; "but what has brought you to the Limes on this warm afternoon?"

"I have come to see you, Violet."

"I ought to be much obliged to you," she replied; "but the afternoon is a very busy time with me. I attend to all these flowers myself."

"I will help you with the flowers, and I hope that I shall be no obstacle to your pleasant thoughts, Violet," he said.

They walked together until they reached an opening in the lawn; there was a bank gay with wild flowers, a hedge full of wild roses, and hawthorns crowned it. Felix took the basket from her hand and placed her on the bank.

"I have come to talk to you, Violet," he said. "You must forget your flowers for a few minutes and listen to me. Such a day as this, Violet, was made for a love-story. I have an idea that everything in nature is interested in mine."

"Your ideas are not of the ordinary kind," she remarked.

"No, they are not, I own. Still they please me, Violet. I have a sweet fancy. Shakespeare says all sweet fancies come to lovers."

"But we are not lovers, Felix," she said, gravely.

"Then I hope we soon shall be. I have a fancy, Violet, that every bird singing in the trees knows why I am here, that the flowers and the sunshine know it."

"Then," observed Violet, "they are wiser than I."

"No, not wiser or sweeter or brighter than you; but it was an idle, pretty fancy, Violet. As I walked under the great shady trees every leaf seemed to stir—as I passed, the roses in the hedges nodded; they said, 'The sun shines and the earth is fair; now is the time for youth and love.'"

Violet looked up at him with a resigned little sigh.

"Not being either a bird or a flower, I am not in their confidence, Felix; and perhaps when you have finished with them you will tell me what you have to say."

"I will tell you now. I have such good news, Violet. Mrs. Hardman, one of my father's clients, has left him six thousand pounds."

Violet's violet eyes opened wide in wonder.

"Six thousand pounds! That is a great deal of money, is it not, Felix?"

"Yes, a very great deal. You know my father has an excellent business, but he did certainly want a little more money. This legacy has made him happier than I can tell you."

"I should not think that money would make any one happy," said Violet, thoughtfully.

"No, it would not. Never hold with that idea, Violet. But this is the important thing—my father will now give me a partnership. My darling, do you understand—a partnership?"

"Yes, Felix—what then?"

"I have one hundred a year that my dear mother left me; I make quite another by reviews and articles for legal papers—that makes two hundred; then from the business I am sure to obtain at least three hundred more—that will give me five hundred a year, Violet; and, my darling, there is a beautiful little cottage *orne* near Oakwoods; and, oh, Violet, Violet, will you be my wife? My darling, you know how long and how faithfully I have loved you. I have come to-day to ask you to be my wife."

Her white hands dropped listlessly; she turned her face to his; no warm flush covered it, no love-light shone in the violet eyes.

"How cruel of you," she said, in soft, lingering tones—"how very cruel on this sunny day to ask me such a question!"

There was no anger in her face, no annoyance—nor was there pleasure or happiness; she looked rather like a child who had been disturbed at play. He was neither anxious nor dismayed, for he understood the expression on her face well.

"Why is it cruel, Violet?" he asked.

"It is cruel. You know I do not want to be married, Felix. I do not like being teased about love."

"But, my darling, no one can look at you and not love you."

"That is not my fault. And, Felix, you should not call me 'darling;' do you not know that is hardly proper?"

"If I knew a word that conveyed more, and sounded more sweetly, I should use it," he said, looking with passionate admiration at the pure, perfect face. "Oh, Violet, do accept me. No one else in the wide world loves you half so much. I would make you so happy that you would never regret it."

"I am very happy now," she murmured, plaintively.

"That little cottage *orne* is so pretty, Violet. There is a charming drawing-room that opens on to a flower garden—imagine that all furnished in white and gold; then there is a little room up stairs I should furnish as a boudoir for you—a room that would be a fitting shrine for my pearl of

pearls. My darling, you should have everything that your heart desires."

She touched his face gently with her dainty hands.

"You would buy the moon for me if I wanted it, and you could obtain it," she said, laughingly. "But, Felix, I do not want the moon, and I do not want to be married. Do talk of something more pleasant."

"Violet, my heart is so full of this; it seemed to me as I came along that I walked on air. I have loved you so long; I have no life apart from you; and I have been waiting so impatiently until I could see a chance of making a beautiful home for you. Now, I see it—do not be cruel to me, Violet, I implore you."

"It is you who are cruel to shadow this fair day by talking of love and marriage, Felix."

The words sounded hard and cold, but there was no coldness on her fair face.

"You know that I have loved you, Violet, ever since we were children."

"Yes, I know it. I should know it—you tell me so every day."

"And you—you have had admirers of every kind, I believe, dark and fair, tall and short; but, Violet, you love me best, do you not?"

The lovely face drooped over a bunch of wild thyme. She did not answer; but he persisted in his questioning.

"You love me best, do you not? Oh, my darling, be a little kind to me!"

There was such passionate love in his handsome eyes, such passionate pain in his face, that she was touched.

"Yes, I do love you, Felix," she said, gently; and then she looked up in alarm. He had clasped her hands in his and covered them with kisses; his dark eyes were dim with tears.

"Oh, my love," he cried, "you hold my heart in the hollow of your hand. If you had said you did not love me, the words would have killed me as surely as ever a man was slain. My darling, do you not see that if you love me you must of necessity be my wife? You must of necessity be my wife," repeated Felix, "or what is the use of love?"

"It is pleasant," she replied; "still, marriage—well, Felix, you will laugh if I tell you that it seems to me like calling a child into a gloomy house from the sunshine and from play."

"That is not a pleasant comparison, Violet, my darling," he remarked, smiling. "You will be very happy. Now

you spend your life among all kinds of bright pretty things. You shall do the same then. No shadow of care shall come near you. You shall know no trouble. You shall be one of the most worshiped as you will be one of the most beautiful of wives."

"But, Felix," she said, slowly, with an air of perplexity on her beautiful face, "it seems to me that marriage is the end of everything. Once married, there is nothing for one to look forward to, nothing, as it were, to hope for: it is the beginning of a dull, gray, monotonous stretch of life."

"You will not always say so, Violet," Felix laughed. "You must marry—you love me. Promise to marry me."

She was looking away beyond the green trees, as though she were trying to peer into some far-off future.

"I do love you," she returned, thoughtfully. "I am sure that I love you—but there seems to be something more wanting. I cannot think this is all that life holds for me; yet I cannot tell what it is I want."

"You love me," said Felix. "I am quite content. The rest is nothing but the natural fear that a young girl has of a new life. Tell me again—my heart hungers for the words—that you love me, Violet."

Slowly she turned her eyes from the distant hills; slowly she raised them to her lover's face. Love him? Certainly she did. His ardent young face had some of the proud stern beauty that immortalized the Greek heroes. There was none like him in Lilford. Certainly she loved him very much. Why hesitate to say so? She spoke slowly, in a sweet, clear voice.

"Most surely, Felix, I love you"—and the words seemed to fill him with delight. He took the soft white hands in his, and held them while he made her repeat again and again that she loved him.

"You can never go back from your word, Violet. No human ear hears us; but behold the great broad sky. Your vow is made to me, darling, before Heaven."

"I have made no vow, Felix."

"You have said that you love me. Violet, make me quite happy now. Already I am so happy that the air seems to intoxicate me. Say you will be my wife."

She was thinking again, with the same far-off look in her eyes, and she said, suddenly:

"A cottage *orne*. Do you mean that pretty villa where the Hendersons staid?"

The question seemed to him almost decisive. She would not have asked it had she meant to refuse him. He could

hardly answer her calmly, but he beat back his emotion. "She is so easily startled," he said to himself—"I must be very cautious what I say to her." He answered:

"Yes, and many of the beautiful things that Captain Henderson bought are there now. To my mind it is the prettiest house in Lilford; and, my darling, I have a vision of you standing in that pretty entrance-hall, waiting for me when business hours are over. I can see the light from the stained-glass window falling on your golden hair. I can see the sunlight lying outside on the flowers. I can see my wife's sweet face grow brighter for my coming. I can see your hands stretched out to welcome me. I can also see the years pass on, and life grow brighter and more beautiful. Do you like the picture, Violet? Will you make it real?"

His great passionate love, shining in his eyes, trembling on his lips, touched her. Her beautiful face grew pale. She was woman enough to feel the beauty of the future he had painted for her—woman enough to appreciate the deep, honest, true love offered to her.

"I would rather not promise," she said; "but I will think of it, Felix."

"You do not refuse, Violet?"

"No, I do not refuse," she answered.

"Why, then," he cried, "the victory is won! You will be my wife. My darling, I love you all the better for your shy, sweet reserve. How could I be so foolish as to fear that I should not marry my sweet girl-love Violet? See, darling, I have been keeping this for you ever since I came home from London last year." He drew a little morocco case from his pocket, and, opening it, took out a pretty ring. It was of gold, set with pearls. "You will let me put this on your finger, Violet. This is your betrothal-ring. You will never part with it—promise me."

She looked at the pretty jewel shining on her finger.

"No, I will never part with it," she said; "but remember, Felix, I have not quite promised."

"Not quite," he returned, with a happy laugh. "You will let me go back to the Limes with you, Violet, and tell Mr. Haye what I have asked you?"

"Must you tell them now so soon?" she asked. "It will be almost the same thing as being married if you tell them."

"It will be only the foreshadowing of a happy future, my Violet. Yes, I must tell them to-night. It would not be

honorable to keep silence; besides, I am so proud of the treasure I have won that I could not be silent if I would."

They went back to the Limes; tea was ready in one of the sunny little rooms that looked into the garden, and Mrs. Haye sat waiting for her daughter. She smiled as the beautiful girl entered with her lover.

"I am not surprised," she said. "I thought it was so. Violet is two hours later than she intended to be, and then does not return alone. That is like Violet."

Later on in the evening Felix told his love-story to Violet's parents, who were pleased with it—pleased, but not elated. Violet was very lovely; she belonged to the gentry. Her beauty ought to have done much for her; still Felix would certainly one day be the leading lawyer in Lilford, and the legacy had quite altered matters. But for that and the partnership, Mr. Haye would not have been willing for his daughter to engage herself to Felix Lonsdale; however, in that country spot he was now a good match. They talked for some time about the prospects of business, about the cottage *orne*, about Lilford, and then Felix knew that it was time for him to go.

Violet went with him to the garden gate. How many times he had blessed that garden gate! A great lilac bush shaded it, and some of the happiest hours of his life had been spent there. The moon was shining and the flowers were steeped in glittering dew as the lovers walked through the garden. It was a long good-night. They stood under the sweet-smelling lilac, and the moonlight seemed to soften Violet's heart just as it softened the beauty of her marvelous face.

"Violet," said her lover, "will you give me one kiss? It is customary at all betrothals, and this has been our betrothal day."

She raised her fair face to his in the moonlight, and he kissed the sweet lips.

"Remember," she told him, "I have not quite promised."

"I have been thinking of your wedding-dress, Violet," he said; "it shall be of white silk. My darling, you will be such a beautiful bride that every one who sees you will want to take you from me."

The lilac leaves were wet with dew, and the lovers laughed as the dew-drops fell over them. They laughed as the night wind swept over the sleeping flowers—as the great boughs swayed and murmured. All the world seemed so fair. Then Felix found that it was growing

late. It was hard to shorten this, the happiest hour of his life, but it must be done.

"Violet, I could stand here saying good-night until morning dawned; but that must not be. Good-night."

Once more he kissed the beautiful face, and whispered to her that she was dearest, sweetest, truest, that the world had no other jewel so rare, that he loved her with his whole soul; but she, when her fair face was resting on his breast and his strong loving arms infolded her, whispered:

"I have not quite promised. Felix, do not forget that."

"I shall remember it only to love you the more," he answered, as he left her; and he smiled to himself each time that he thought of the words.

"You have brought good news home, Felix," said Mrs. Lonsdale, when she saw the happy light shining in his dark eyes.

"Yes, *madre*, good news," he replied. "I have seen Violet, and she was more beautiful and charming than I have ever seen her yet."

"And she promised," began Mrs. Lonsdale—and then she stopped suddenly, thinking to herself that after all she had no right to put the interrogatory that was on her lips. Felix looked at her with a bright smile.

"She will be my wife, *madre*. Mr. and Mrs. Haye are both willing. She has not exactly promised, but she will marry me when I have a house ready for her."

Love and youth were strong within him; the mighty passion stirred his heart; he could not breathe within the narrow compass of four walls. He went out into the moonlight; he could think of it all—realize it all—better there. He had won Violet. She was his own, the beautiful girl whom every one loved and admired—his own, to love him and bless him, to crown his life.

The union was a settled thing. Both families met and talked it over. It was a certainty; and a few days after Felix had placed the little pearl ring on Violet's finger he went to make inquiries about the cottage *orne*, while Mrs. Lonsdale said to herself more than once, "I do not know how it is, but I wish that he had chosen Evelyn Lester."

CHAPTER IV.

A STRONG-MINDED WOMAN.

The news of an engagement was always well received in Lilford; it was something to discuss, to think of—some-

thing in which both maids and matrons took a lively interest; and it was certain that no engagement ever courted so much discussion as this. How intensely the young farmers in the neighborhood detested Felix Lonsdale for having won beautiful Violet! Each one made up his mind that Felix Lonsdale should do no more business for him, and wondered why she preferred a lawyer to a farmer. All the old people thought it a most suitable alliance. Felix and Violet, they said, were equal in position, and marriages of that kind were the best. Mothers who had daughters of their own to marry were thankful that beautiful Violet would rival them no longer. The girls thought that Violet had won a prize, for there was certainly no one in all the country-side like Felix.

There was one pure, gentle heart to whom the news of the engagement came like a terrible blow, although it had long been expected. Evelyn Lester had never even owned to herself that she loved Felix Lonsdale, yet, when she heard the news, it seemed to her that the bright face of heaven was hidden from her by a dark funereal pall. They had all been children together, and in their childish quarrels it was always Evelyn who defended Felix. He could do no wrong in her eyes; in her opinion the wide world held no other so brave, so handsome, or so noble; and the childish love had unconsciously grown with her—she called it friendship, and believed it to be nothing else. Felix had a real friendship for her, a real admiration, a great esteem, but nothing like love. He lent her books, he frequently asked Mrs. Lonsdale to invite her to the house; but it was all because he was sorry for her, and thought her life lonely and sad. Evelyn was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of a strong-minded aunt, Jane Lester, mistress of the pretty little farm known as the Outlands. Miss Lester would say of herself, "I am nothing if I am not strong-minded," and therein she spoke the truth.

She looked like a strong-minded woman. She was thin and angular; she had what she called a useful complexion —the sun did not darken it, nor did the wind ever freshen it into deeper bloom; her gray hair was braided in most severely uncompromising style; her dress was of plain, rich material. In writing the word "woman" she always used a capital "W," and a capital "H" in "Humanity." Of men as a whole she had the poorest possible opinion; she had the profoundest contempt for all their sentiments, principles, and inventions. She went to extreme lengths in her views about the rights of women. Where there was

a man she was accustomed to say there was mischief. "If you want anything done well, do it yourself," she counseled; "do not leave it to men." She had a certain conviction that if the world were governed by women it would be quite another place. She did not dislike men, she had simply a superb contempt for them—a lofty pity and compassion that were infinitely amusing even to the objects of them.

It was the puzzle of the whole neighborhood how so sweet a girl as Eve Lester could have grown up under the charge of one like her Aunt Jane. Eve was not beautiful. She was the perfect type of an English girl—graceful, healthy, with a rounded figure, a clear complexion, fair brown hair, red, ripe lips, a face that one would call sweet rather than beautiful; the dark gray eyes were clear and tender, long lashes shading them—a frank, noble soul spoke from her eyes; her lips were firm and sensitive, with sweet and gracious curves about them. Of a hundred men perhaps ninety-nine would have passed Eve by and thought but little of her; the hundredth would have considered her face one of the sweetest and dearest. There was a quiet dignity about her, a graceful ease and self-possession that delighted her aunt. Evelyn had a small fortune entirely at her own command, but her aunt was always at hand to see that there was no undue expense.

The Outlands was a pretty farm not more than half a mile from Lilford, and Miss Lester was supposed to have made money. She, with her niece, belonged to the gentry, but, owing to the elder woman's peculiarities, the two ladies visited but seldom and seldom received any visitors.

If there was one man in Jane Lester's eyes less contemptible than another it was certainly Felix Lonsdale. "The boy has a beautiful face," she was accustomed to say of him, "and beauty is a woman's gift." So because he had a "woman's gift" Miss Lester looked more kindly on him. She liked to see him at the Outlands. She gave him any amount of good advice; she was pleased that he should be a friend of Evelyn's.

No one was more delighted than Jane Lester to hear of the legacy, but the engagement did not please her so well. Love and marriage were folly in her eyes.

"I am disappointed in you, Felix Lonsdale," she said, sharply. "I thought you had a little more sense than the generality of men. Pray expect no congratulations from me—I have none to give."

But Eve smiled at him with her clear, tender eyes.

"I am very pleased," she said, "for I know that you love Violet dearly."

"We shall always be friends," he told her.

And she answered him with a happy smile on her sweet face:

"Always."

They would always be friends; for she desired nothing better in life than the friendship of Felix Lonsdale.

Miss Lester was perhaps a trifle more disagreeable than usual for the next two or three days, and then, to all outward appearance, everything went on as usual at the Outlands; but to Eve Lester life was never quite the same again. She was innocently unconscious of her love. If any one had suddenly taxed her with it she would most indignantly have denied it. She hardly knew that the love of the woman differed from the love of the child. She did not know why the smiling earth and the fair heavens had so suddenly grown dark to her. She did not know why the spring of her life had left her.

* * * * * * * *

Darcy Lonsdale had taken Vale House; he had for once in his life-time the pleasure of ordering new carpets and pretty furniture. Mrs. Lonsdale was delighted. She had engaged a treasure of a nursery governess, and prepared herself to enjoy life in real earnest. The deed of partnership had been drawn up, and the firm was known as Lonsdale & Son. Every one agreed that Darcy had done a very wise thing in making his clever, bright, intellectual son a partner. Felix had taken the pretty cottage *orne*, and his spare time was devoted to preparing it for his beautiful bride. He had seen some fine photographs one day that he fancied would look well framed and hung upon the walls. He asked Violet to look at them, but he could not get her to speak freely upon anything. The photographs were beautiful—with the most charming of smiles she condescended to say so; that was all. She was evidently in an amiable humor, and Felix resolved to make the most of it.

"Violet, do come and see the house?" he begged. "You say that you never visited it while the Hendersons lived there. You canot tell how pretty the rooms are; do come and see them."

It was a brilliantly beautiful day in July; the sun shone on lilies and roses, on flowers of every hue; the earth lay in the warm heat and brilliant haze—there was a hush and

sweet brooding silence over all. Violet could not refuse; putting aside all other thoughts, it would be pleasant to see the interior of a pretty house. Mrs. Lonsdale offered to go also, and the three started together. But Mrs. Lonsdale had been in love herself, and she had pity on her step-son. When they had admired the beautiful grounds and gardens she said, laughingly:

"The kitchen will not interest you; it does me. I will go and inspect it."

Then Felix showed Violet the pretty rooms he had planned for her.

"The charm of them," he said, "is that they are full of light and brightness; from every window you see flowers and trees, through every door comes a breath of perfumed air. Oh, my Violet, we can be so happy here!"

"Is that jessamine growing yonder?" she asked. "Do gather a few sprays, Felix. I think I am fonder of jessamine than I am of any flower that blows."

He went in compliance with her wish. What request of hers could he have refused? And Violet Haye stood alone in the home that her lover sought to make hers. She stood there dainty and bewitching; she looked round. The rooms were very pretty; she tried to imagine herself mistress there; she tried to picture herself living there, going in and out, waiting for Felix, giving orders. She tried to realize what life would be like when she was married and lived there. There would be no future to look forward to, no sweet, bright possibilities. "I should know all my life, then," she thought, "it would hold nothing brighter than this," and the dainty little foot tapped the floor. "Here it would all begin and end; there would be no more dreaming," and she had dreamed wildly of a different life from this. Still she loved Felix.

"I wonder," said the dainty young beauty to herself, "in what I differ from other girls. I know not one but many who would gladly change their fate for mine, who would marry Felix Lonsdale and be happy in his love, who would think this pretty house a palace, and would find the contentment and true happiness of a life-time within its walls; why cannot I do the same? What is it that I am always looking for, hoping for, expecting? What more do I want? I cannot understand myself—and I am sure no one else can understand me."

The violet eyes glanced wistfully round the pretty rooms; why was she not content?

"I love Felix," she told herself; "and it seems to me

that if I made an effort I could be happy and contented here. What is the effort that I have to make? I love Felix; nothing on earth can make me alter that fact."

Yet she did not feel quite at ease. There was a vague, shadowy feeling of something wanting that she had not yet found.

Felix amused her with his raptures when he returned. It was so novel, so delightful to see her there; and the day was never forgotten by him, because she had been gracious to him upon it.

CHAPTER V.

"YOU WILL NEED A FRIEND."

The inhabitants of Lilford were pleased at Darcy Lonsdale's good fortune. He deserved it, they said; his honest, honorable, industrious life had been spent among them; they had known him as boy and man; they had been interested in his marriages, in his children, in his business; he was one of themselves; they had been interested in his joys and sorrows and in his welfare, and now they were pleased at his good fortune.

With this sudden and unexpected gleam of prosperity came other gleams; his business increased; and Darcy Lonsdale owned to himself that he was a most fortunate man. He removed with his household to Vale House; and Felix began to think that he might induce Violet to marry him before the end of the year. He did not often speak to her of their marriage, for it was a difficult task; she would evade the question in a hundred different ways; she would laugh, yet look charming—do anything, in fact, but reply to his inquiry as to when they should be united.

He went to the Limes one lovely summer evening, quite resolved upon not coming away without a definite answer. Violet was looking even more charming than usual; she wore a white dress with blush roses, and her fair girlish face was like a sweet flower. He persuaded her to come out with him, beguiling her on to the lawn under the pretext of showing her the gorgeous western sky.

"I do not care for sunsets, Felix," she said. "I cannot go into raptures over them. I see the sun set in some fashion or other every evening."

But he was so determined that she thought it less trouble to accede to his wish. The sight of the glorious sky made her thoughtful; then, when she was in a frame of mind

proper for listening, he turned to her. How dazzlingly beautiful her face was in the sunlight.

"Violet," he said, "I want to quote a couple of lines from a familiar ballad to you. Can you guess what it is?"

"No, I cannot; I do not care for familiar ballads," she replied. "What is it?"

"You know 'My Pretty Jane,'" he said. "The lines I want to quote to you are these:

> 'Name the day, the wedding-day,
> And I will buy the ring.'

Now, sweet Violet, that is just what I want you to do—tell me when that happy day will dawn for me. Do not let the summer sunshine and the summer flowers all die before you are my wife."

She turned her startled face to his.

"You are cruel, Felix," she said. "You always spoil these lovely sunny days by talking about marriage."

"My heart is full of it," he replied—"at least it is full of you. I do not wish to startle you, Violet, but give me one kind word to dream about now. I am always wondering, 'When will our marriage take place? When will my darling consent? When will the end come to all my uncertainties, doubts, and fears? When shall I be able to say to myself, 'On such a day I shall bring home my wife?'"

She answered, half impatiently.

"You make so terribly sure of everything, Felix."

"Have I not the rightt to do so in this case?" he asked, laughing half sadly at her.

"I did not quite promise, you know, Felix."

"Perhaps not in so many words, Violet, but in honor you are bound to be my wife."

"I am willing to be your wife, Felix, but let me enjoy my youth a little longer. I am only nineteen—there is no hurry."

"You forget," he interrupted, "how dearly I love you, Violet, and how I long for you to be with me. If I thought you did not love me, Violet, I would not urge my request—I would go far away, and occupy my life as well as I could—nay, I would rather die than make you unhappy. If you do not love me, I will not hold you pledged to me, Violet."

"But I do love you," she said, looking up at him with sweet perplexed eyes; "still, Felix, it seems so sudden—"

"Hardly sudden, darling," he interrupted, "when I have

loved you since you were seven years old. You will be just as happy when you are my wife as you are now—will you not?"

"I cannot tell," she replied.

If she had spoken the real truth she would have told him that she was unwilling to lay down her sovereignty—that the homage and admiration she received were very precious to her—that she enjoyed them—that she liked to know she was the queen of the country-side. All that of course would end when she was married. The married ladies she knew led dull lives—or dull they seemed to her—spent in the routine of duty. They superintended their households, nursed their children, directed their servants. It seemed dreary work to her—a life that held little. She had hoped for more than this; her brilliant beauty ought to bring her a brighter fate than that which these plain-faced matrons had met.

While she sat musing with these thoughts plainly written on her fair face Felix was looking earnestly at her.

"Let me say September, Violet," he pleaded; "that is a glorious month, and the house will be quite ready. My darling, gladden my heart with one word."

But he was never quite sure whether she had spoken that word or not; her eyes were dim with tears, and she murmured something to the effect that she loved him—had always loved him; while something of remorse seemed to tinge her manner. Her fingers thrilled him with their soft touch, her lovely lips quivered as she talked to him—but he could never tell whether she had whispered the word he wanted.

That evening, when he reached home, Evelyn Lester was there, and a sense of rest came over him at the first glance at her sweet face. She went up to him with the gentle grace and dignity that characterized her.

"Felix, I have heard good news—you are favored in fortune and in love. Is it all true?"

"Yes"—he told her it was all true; he had been spending the evening at the Limes—he had just left Violet.

He walked home with Evelyn, and he was struck with the strange sense of rest that came over him. She was not beautiful, but the sweet face was very fair and very tender, her voice musical and full of sympathy; she spoke so kindly of beautiful Violet, she praised her so generously and warmly, she spoke with such real enthusiasm of her loveliness, of the admiration she excited, of her brilliancy, that his heart warmed to her. She listened with such

sweet sympathy to all that he had to say—to his history of the cottage, and of the pretty furniture and pictures he hoped to place therein; she was interested in it all. He said to himself that it was strange what perfect rest he found with her, a something which he could not describe, a sense of deep tranquillity and repose.

"I think, Evelyn," he said, as he stood at the hall door of the Outlands, "that no man was ever so blessed. I have the truest and fairest of loves, and the truest and warmest of friends."

The moon was shining brightly, and Eve stood in silence for a few minutes, watching him.

"You will need a friend," she thought, "and, when you do, you shall not fail to find one."

CHAPTER VI.

FOREBODINGS.

"That young man ought to be satisfied with his lot in life," said Jane Lester, as her niece told her of Felix Lonsdale's successes.

"He is quite satisfied, auntie," Evelyn returned, gently.

"The worst thing that any man can do is to marry a girl with a pretty face," said the aunt. "Pretty girls are a mistake—they think themselves too good for anything. Felix Lonsdale has acted foolishly—Violet Haye will never make him a good wife."

"She is young, and she loves him very dearly," remarked Evelyn.

"Youth and love—would any wise man build his house on such foundations?" said her aunt. "I tell you, Evelyn, it is a mistake, and Lonsdale will find it so. I read a character quickly, and I have read Violet Haye's."

"She loves him," repeated Evelyn, who could imagine nothing more unanswerable.

"Love—we know what a lasting sentiment that is," sneered Miss Lester. "If he married a sensible woman with a nice little fortune, I should have some hope; but the very curl of that girl's hair shows what she is."

Evelyn laughed as she thought of the glorious golden hair that had always been Violet's glory.

"There is no other hair in Lilford like it, auntie," she replied.

"It is a very good thing," was the retort. "I am no friend to nonsense."

No unfriendly criticisms reached Felix Lonsdale's ears—none could have hurt him. He had now the one great prize of his life; he was happy beyond all power of words to tell. It pleased him, too, that all his friends and neighbors took such kindly interest in him; it was pleasant to meet with congratulations and good wishes—to see life lying so fair and so clear before him—to feel his youth and his strength—to feel his happiness thrilling every vein. He felt that he had nothing left in life to wish for; Heaven had been good to him, and had granted him his heart's desire. He would have felt a little happier perhaps had Violet been less coy. But that very coyness had a charm of its own; it suited her; he could not imagine her other than coy; and, as for doubt or fear or mistrust, such shadows never darkened his mind. The heaven of his love was clear and cloudless. Violet would grow less coy in time; it was better for her to be shy and reserved as she was than lay herself out for admiration as some did.

He had settled in his own mind that he would persuade her to become his wife before chill October killed the flowers and stripped the trees. So he thought and hoped and dreamed, while a cloud was rising in the distance no larger than a man's hand.

One day Darcy Lonsdale returned with a perplexed look on his face to his new house. His wife, wondering at it, asked him:

"What is the matter, Darcy?"

After thinking for a few minutes he answered:

"Nothing; my brain seems to be full of foolish fancies."

The next time he returned home it was evening, and the pleasant tea-table th happy circle of bright faces, might have gladdened any man's heart; but Darcy Lonsdale looked dull. Again his wife asked what was wrong, and he laughed uneasily, she thought.

"The very air seems thick with fancies," he answered. "I saw three of my best friends this morning standing in a group in Castle street, and when I joined them I knew by the startled, embarrassed expression on each man's face that they had been talking about me."

"What could they have to say about you?" asked Kate. "It was all fancy, Darcy."

"No; I am sure they were speaking of me. I went to the bank this morning, and as I was entering the door I distinctly heard the manager say, 'Mistaken in Lonsdale.' I heard the words as plainly as you hear them now. He was

talking to one of the partners, and they were both cool, I thought, in their manner."

Kate threw her arms around his neck and kissed his anxious face.

"Why should any one talk about you or be cool to you, dear? You have done no wrong."

"No, but there is something—I am quite sure there is something, Kate—in the minds of people about me. I cannot imagine what it is."

Kate tried to cheer him; she laughed at the notion. What could there be? She knew that there was no one like him. No one could accuse him of a mean action; his life had always been fair open, loyal, and transparent. It was absurd. He must be out of health; he should go away and rest himself for a time. People cool to him, indeed! She would like to see any one treat him with less respect and honor than he deserved. The kind, tender face flushed, the soft eyes filled with tears. She would have done battle for him with the whole world. There was nothing in what he said, she felt quite sure, but failing health.

Yet she waited anxiously for him the next day. She was somewhat surprised, for there had been a perfect deluge of tradesmen's bills—an occurrence that had never happened before. The baker had sent in his bill, and the butcher wanted ready money, the upholsterers who had furnished Vale House pressed for a settlement in consequence of unlooked-for losses. Kate showed the bills to her husband.

"What does it mean?" she asked, wonderingly.

"It means, my dear, that there is some subtle agency at work against us—I cannot tell what. It means also that the tradespeople must be paid at once. Indeed, Kate, we should have been wiser had we waited till the legacy had been paid to us before we came here."

"But it is certain," said Kate, a little anxiously.

"As certain as fate," he replied; and then they talked a little more cheerfully about what they would do when the money was at command.

That same evening Felix came home looking slightly preoccupied. He had seen one of their oldest clients go into George Malcolm's office, and the vicar of the parish, the Reverend Daniel Hunter, had passed him with the coldest of bows. He also had an impression that there was something wrong. He could tell neither what it was nor why it was.

Felix thought that there would be time to walk over to

the Limes. He had a very beautiful book that he had bought for Violet, and he wanted to give it to her.

It struck him, when he entered the drawing-room at the Limes, that the three assembled there had been speaking of him, their greeting was so awkward, so constrained, so unlike the genial, kindly reception that had always been given to him hitherto. Mrs. Haye held out her hand to him, but her eyes fell, and her husband's half-murmured words were inaudible; Violet looked embarrassed, and for the first time under that hospitable roof the young lover felt ill at ease.

When he laid the volume on the table Mr. Haye took it up.

"This must have cost something," he said, "for it is very handsome. It would be better to save money than to spend it—we none of us know when an evil day may come."

"I do not fear evil days," remarked Felix, with all the sanguine hope of a young man.

"The wisest among us may expect them," said Mr. Haye, briefly.

Then the conversation languished, and Felix grew so uncomfortable that he decided upon returning home. He had no misgiving—he thought he had called at an inauspicious moment—he had perhaps interrupted some domestic conference. He cared only to see Violet. If she would go to the gate with him, so that he would have time for a few words, all would be well.

But when he had said good-night to the two seniors, and asked Violet if she would walk to the gate with him, Mrs. Haye interposed.

"It is too cold," she said. "Violet has been complaining of headache all day; she must not go out."

And the tone was so decided, so stern, that Felix could not oppose Mrs. Haye. He held Violet's hand one minute in his; he tried to look into the depths of her beautiful eyes, but they drooped from his, and he could not see them. He left her with a few whispered words, feeling more unhappy than he had ever felt before.

The night was beautiful: the wind was soft and fragrant, the sky calm and clear, the moon shining brightly. He smiled as he asked himself why he should be unhappy. What was there to make him so? Why need he feel depressed? Yet the very air around him was filled with whisperings—the night-wind full of sighs. "I am growing

fanciful," he said to himself; "and what tangible evil have I to grasp?"

There was nothing but a cloud of fancies; his prospects were bright enough. He said to himself over and over again that no one was so fortunate. Had he not a partnership? Had he not a certainty of calling the loveliest girl in the county his wife? What had he to fear? Yet what was the strange dull pain that made his brave young heart fail him? What caused the strange shuddering that came over him? Why had he a keen and penetrating, a vague indefinite feeling of an evil day to come? He tried to repress it; he could understand women being nervous, but not men.

For the first time he noticed that night a look of anxiety on his father's face, and he asked what had brought it there.

"Shadows—nothing but shadows; fancies—troublesome fancies," was the reply; yet it was strange the son turned away with a feeling almost of despair.

Nor was the mystery lessened when on the day following, Mrs. Lonsdale, going on her daily round of shopping, met the vicar's wife, Mrs. Hunter, who stopped to speak to her.

"This is a very sad affair, Mrs. Lonsdale," she said, and Kate, looking at her, asked quietly what affair she meant.

She looked so entirely unconscious that the vicar's wife was surprised.

"Have you heard no bad news of—of—any one?" she asked, and Kate answered, "No."

Then Mrs. Hunter related some trifling little story, and even as she related it Kate told herself that she was inventing it. With her honest, straightforward eyes she looked at the vicar's lady.

"You are not telling me what was in your mind when you first spoke to me," she said. "What were you thinking of, Mrs. Hunter?"

But Mrs. Hunter, after laughingly parrying the remark, hastily said good-morning in a very embarrassed fashion, and walked away.

Mrs. Hunter's remark could mean nothing; yet the heart of the loving, anxious wife grew heavy within her. Sad news? What sad news could there be affecting her or hers? And, if there was sad news about any one else, why could she not have said what it was?

She was the third who went home that day with a terrible sense of foreboding. Her pretty house seemed almost to oppress her. She wished that she had not burdened her

self with a nursery governess; as for the new silk dress, it no longer gave her the least pleasure. What was this cloud hanging over her husband and her children? Was it only nervous fancy, or was there evil looming in the distance?

She was soon to know, and when she did know it proved to be even greater than she feared.

CHAPTER VII.

"GIVE THE MONEY BACK AGAIN."

"I am very sorry—I think it unjust; but it is quite impossible to say how it will end," said George Malcolm, the lawyer.

For the secret was known now—the shadow had become a substance, the vague fancies had all assumed a form, the airy nothings had become realities so stern and so cruel that they had driven Darcy Lonsdale almost to despair. Mrs. Hardman's heir-at-law, James Hardman, had given legal notice that he intended to contest his relative's will on the ground of undue influence. He maintained—and nothing could shake his opinion—that Darcy Lonsdale had taken undue advantage of his position, that he had influenced a weak-minded woman, and had persuaded her to leave him the half of her money. It was a clever ruse, advising her to send for another lawyer; but it would not help him.

Mr. Lonsdale found that the rumors about him had been growing daily, that his friends and neighbors were all talking of him, while he himself had not the faintest idea of the mischief that was abroad. James Hardman had been in Lilford—that he knew, and the fact had not interested him in any way; but he did not know that James Hardman had been silently destroying his reputation, had called upon his old friends, and had, in the most subtle fashion, insinuated that there had been a conspiracy against him, and that he intended to dispute the will. Every one in Lilford knew this before the least rumor of it reached Darcy Lonsdale. He went at once to Mr. Malcolm, but the honest lawyer had no cheering news for him.

"I am a lawyer myself," he said, "but I can never tell how a lawsuit may end; it may take the right turn, and again it may take a wrong one."

"But," returned Darcy Lonsdale, "Mrs. Hardman meant

me to have the money, did she not? That one broad fact no one can dispute."

"I believe honestly that she intended you to have it. I know she did. She talked to me for some time about the good it would do to you and your children."

"Then what can there be found to dispute? She intended to give me the money, and she did give it—what is it to any one?" cried Darcy Lonsdale.

"The law deals heavily with cases like this. James Hardman will plead that he is heir-at-law, that he is the rightful heir of the late Elizabeth Hardman, that he had been brought up in expectation of receiving the money, and that you have taken an undue advantage of your position as her legal adviser and friend to induce her to leave it to you."

"But," declared Mr. Lonsdale, "I did no such thing. I swear to you I never asked, influenced, or said one word to her about it. How dare any man say such a thing of me?"

"James Hardman has been brought up to believe that he would inherit twelve thousand pounds, and, finding six of it given elsewhere, he is very angry about it, and says some bitter things."

"But how is it possible that any one who knows me could believe that I have acted unfairly? How can my old friends and neighbors believe it? I have lived among them all my life—they ought to know me better. I should not believe such a scandal of any one of them"—and tears of wounded pride and wounded affection stood in his eyes. "What are a man's friends worth, Malcolm, if they believe evil of him so easily?"

"Perhaps they do not all believe it," said George Malcolm.

"Then why do they not say so? Why not say, 'We have known you for years, and we believe in you?' Why not say that instead of looking coldly on me. As I pass by they converse about me in whispers, and are startled when I meet them."

"James Hardman has talked a great deal among them," said Mr. Malcolm, slowly. "He has said some hard things of you."

"But my old friends," rejoined Darcy Lonsdale, "the people I have lived among so long, how can they believe such slander?"

"I am not much of a cynic, but this I must say, that I

believe our misfortunes are not always displeasing even to those we call our friends."

"But these people have known me so long."

Mr. Lonsdale could think of nothing so strange as that—no argument was so potent. He had lived among them all his life. Why did they not trust him as he trusted them?

"If any one among them had come to me and had told me such a thing of another, I would not have credited it—and they are only too ready, it seems, to believe it of me. Malcolm, how in Heaven's name am I to go home and tell this to my wife? Am I to tell her that a blameless life spent in the midst of people who have known me since I was a child, is no shield against slander?"

"I am very sorry for you," said George Malcolm; "I can say no more. I do not believe it, and I shall stand by you through it all."

The two men shook hands, but Darcy Lonsdale's face wore a puzzled, wondering look.

"Can it be a jest, do you think, Malcolm—a jest to try me?"

"No, it is no jest. Hardman will get the money if he can."

"I would not take it unless I thought it were really mine—I would refuse to touch it; but I cannot do that, for I am sure my old friend left it to me for the children. I must be just to them. Great Heaven, I have kept a blameless name all my life only to meet with this fate—to see my old friends point at me as a man who would cheat his client. I wish I had been dead before I had known this. Tell me what Hardman is going to do."

"He has placed the whole matter in the hands of a London firm, and the trial will come on about the end of September. You must prepare your defense and look up your witnesses."

"If my whole life does not witness for me," said Darcy Lonsdale, with quiet dignity, "then the words of no man can benefit me."

He dreaded going home—for the first time in his life he disliked passing through the streets of his native town, for the first time he shrank from the glances and words of his old comrades.

"Heaven help Kate!" he said to himself. "How am I to tell her?"

But Kate knew already—such news travels fast. It was no weeping, hysterical wife who clung to him, half mad

with womanish fear; a bright, tender face looked into his, sweet, warm, white hands clasped his, loving lips kissed him, a brave, bright voice cheered him with the music of home words.

"I have heard all about it, Darcy," said his wife. "Never mind—no one can injure you. You are innocent, honest, and honorable. Never mind what any one says—Heaven knows the truth, and I love you all the more that you bear this blame so well."

Darcy Lonsdale was relieved to find his wife so cheerful, and they sat down to discuss their difficulty.

"Give the money back again, Darcy," said his wife. "If I were in your place I would not touch one shilling of it."

"If I did that it would look as though I feared inquiry, as though I knew that I had gained it by wrong means, and remorse compelled me to return it. It seems to me now that I am compelled, in justification of my own honor, to keep it—Mrs. Hardman certainly meant me to have it. Then there are the children—I cannot rob them; I must not take from them what is really theirs."

"But," said his wife, "if there should be a trial, and it should go against you?"

"Then I must bear it like a man, Kate. I have had many blessings—if it pleases Heaven to send me a reverse, I must not complain."

But, for all that, she knew that his heart was sore and heavy, and that he was disturbed by a hundred doubts and fears. She soothed him, comforted him, and did her best to encourage him; but she could not persuade him to forget his trouble for a moment—it was always in his thoughts.

Presently Felix came in, and one glance at his son's face told Darcy Lonsdale that he had heard the whole story. The handsome young face was full of emotion. He went straight up to his father, and laid his hand lovingly upon his shoulder.

"Let me help you, father," he said. "No man shall say one word against you while I live."

And the two men—father and son—shook hands. There was more expressed in that silent grasp than there could have been in a volume of words.

"You have heard the story, I suppose, Felix?" said Mrs. Lonsdale.

"Yes, I have heard it, and a more cruelly unjust story never was told. Let me help to fight your battle, father. I should like to take every man who believes the story, or who affects to believe it, and thrash him."

"My dear Felix!" exclaimed gentle Mrs. Lonsdale.

"So I should, *madre*," and the young, handsome face deepened with angry scorn for every one who should harbor an evil thought of one so beloved. The love between father and son was almost pathetic in its intensity.

Presently Mrs. Lonsdale said, musingly:

"What will Violet say when she hears it?"

"Say?" cried Felix. "She will be indignant. She will agree with me that any man who listens to it ought to be shot. Why do you look so strangely at me, *madre?*"

"I was wondering," she said, "whether this would make any difference to her or to her parents—I mean in respect to yourself."

"Difference? No—yet I am wrong. Yes, it will make this one difference. She will love me the better, and cling to me the more. I have no doubt about Violet—my sweet Violet. It is the one thing needed to quicken her love for me with a new, strange life."

He wondered why Mrs. Lonsdale sighed. Why need any one sigh? Violet's love, Violet's faith, was his rock of refuge. To doubt her would be death.

"I have no fear," he said, throwing back his head proudly. "Violet will love me now as she has never loved me before. My only trouble is about my dear father, and what I can do to help him."

They talked until long after midnight; they looked the evil in the face. If they went to law, and the law was against them, what then? They would be dreadfully embarrassed for ready money. The nursery governess must go, but they could remain at Vale House, and the partnership should not be dissolved.

CHAPTER VIII.

"YOU ARE AN ANGEL."

The autumn was come; the golden glory of summer had given way to it. The luxuriant trees made the woods a picture. The yellow leaves lay in dank heaps, the corn had all been cut and carried, the fruit gathered; the gloaming was longer, the sunset had clouds of deeper crimson.

The little town of Lilford had experienced a social earthquake. The great trial of Lonsdale *versus* Hardman had been decided, and the verdict—no one but the twelve intelligent jurymen who gave it knew why—was against Darcy Lonsdale; the will was declared null and void, and

the whole of the property was to be given to James Hardman.

That was hard; but hardest of all were the cruel things said by the plaintiff's counsel. Darcy Lonsdale listened to them like one in a dream. He heard all kinds of underhand motives attributed to him; he heard himself described as a conspirator, as one who had taken advantage of his position to influence a weak-minded woman. He listened to words which burned him, branded him—which almost robbed him of his self-respect—which so completely bewildered him that, if he had been a weaker man, he would not have known whether he was guilty or not. The blameless life of which he was so proud, the blameless name which he valued above all other blessings, were bespattered. As he listened to the cruel words, which fell like molten lead on his heart and home, he could have cried aloud that it was all false—he had lived in Lilford both as boy and man, and all his old friends knew that he was incapable of doing any creature a wrong or an injury.

He called few witnesses. He might have made a far better defense than he did but that he trusted so entirely to the notion that his own innocence must be patent to all men. The verdict was against him—unjustly so, some said, for the judge had summed up favorably for him—and Darcy Lonsdale went home crushed and heart-broken.

Those were dreary days in Vale House.

"I shall never hold up my head again," said Darcy Lonsdale, with a deep sob. "I shall never look my fellow-men in the face."

That his old friends should have believed this of him pained the brave, honest heart. He had a long illness, from which it was feared at first that he would never recover.

It was a dreary time. The business fell away; the townspeople said to each other, with a grave shake of the head, that they could not trust a man of whom such things had been said—they could not leave their interests, as before, in his hands. One after another the old names disappeared from his books. Men he had known all his simple life fought shy of him, avoided him, and the dreary time passed on.

Felix worked hard, but it was like rowing against an angry current. There were some gleams of comfort; one of them neither father nor son ever forgot.

It was an evening in October, dark and chill. For the first time the invalid had come down stairs, and the weight

of anxiety upon him was like a weight of lead. Those were days of strict economy in Vale House. There was no tempting fruit for the feeble appetite, no generous wine to give strength to the feeble frame. The best medicine that the invalid had were the cheering kindly words of his wife, the love of his son.

That evening Felix came home late from his office; he was tired owing to the hard work and ill fortune of the day. He fought nobly with misfortune, but he fought in vain. His kind face brightened when he saw a letter for him. It must be from Violet. Who would write to him except Violet? And despite all his sorrows his heart glowed as he thought of her, his beautiful love. Oh, to escape, if only for one hour, and sun himself in the light of her presence! He saw her so seldom now. He was hard at work during the day, and the nights were too cold for walks and rambles. He occasionally went over to the Limes; but the welcome that he received there was not of the warmest, and he could not see Violet alone.

He took up the letter with a smile, and read it. It was not from Violet, but from her father, Francis Haye, saying that the marriage must be deferred for at least a year, as he was quite sure that under the circumstances Felix could not hamper himself with a wife. "Violet was," he said, "of the same opinion, as he would see," and, indeed, there was a rose-tinted, sweet-scented note from Violet—just a few lines—to the effect that she thought her father was right.

He laid the notes down with a feeling of burning pain, a thrill of passionate anguish that frightened him. Nothing on earth, no power of man, should take her from him. She was his own, and he would hold her until life was ended. Then he owned to himself that Mr. Haye was right—cruelly right—that without money, with an invalid father, a failing business, he could not take a wife. It was right to defer it. He must be patient. After all, he had not lost her, he reflected. She was still his own.

There came to him a mad desire to see her, to caress the golden hair, to kiss the lovely lips that had on them the breath and fragrance of roses, to clasp the sweet white hands in his own, to hear the music of the voice that had no equal—a wild, mad longing. He read her note through again to see if he had overlooked some kindly word, to see if she had written "my love." Then he thought to himself that the little note was written for her father to see—for his faith in her was great; he could not believe that her

love for him was not as true and as fervent as his love for her.

"Have you some good news there, Felix?" asked the feeble voice of his father; and the next moment Felix had repressed the emotion so rapidly mastering him, as he crushed the letter in his hand.

"It is only a note from Violet, father," he replied, and the satisfied smile on his father's face rewarded him. Darcy Lonsdale knew that while Violet was true to his idolized son nothing else would hurt him.

They were alone—father and son—for Kate had gone to the nursery—when the hall-door bell rang. Felix said, cheerfully:

"Here is a visitor."

"Few visitors will come here; we have lost a fortune, not found one," said Darcy Lonsdale, who had never spoken a cynical word before.

But it was a visitor, and one whom they were both well content to see. It was Evelyn Lester, with a basket of grapes and delicacies of all kinds for the invalid, and, what was better still, with the light of love and kindness on her sweet face, and with words of sympathy on her lips. As Felix saw her bending over his father, he half wished for a moment that Violet had done something like this—had come to see them in their distress. Then he blamed himself for wishing that she were other than she was. Violet was a goddess to be worshiped—Evelyn a mortal woman. He saw his father's face brighten as the girl's sweet voice soothed him with well-chosen words.

"I knew you would come, Eve," he said. "Felix, place a chair for her close here by my side; it is like breathing the fresh air of May to look at you, Eve. Now tell me, child, something that will brighten me."

It was a pretty picture—the invalid lying on his couch, the girl with her sweet face and earnest eyes bending over him, and, watching them at a distance, the handsome son; the fire burned brightly, the lamps were lighted, while outside the north wind wailed mournfully.

Evelyn took up a bunch of ripe purple grapes.

"I want to see you eat some of these," she said. "Mrs. Lonsdale told me that you ate nothing yesterday." And taking the grapes one by one in her white fingers she held them to his lips.

How could he refuse? He was so weak and feeble, he had been so completely crushed by cruel words, that the girl's simple kindness moved him.

"I have been heart-broken, Eve," he said. "I did not care to get well."

"You will live it down," she returned, gently; "and those who have doubted you will be the first to feel ashamed of their injustice."

"You have never doubted me, Eve?"

"Oh, never! How could I? I should doubt all the world first."

Then she arose from her chair and knelt down by his side; she took both his hands—such thin, worn hands!—in hers, and held them there.

"I came to say something to you, Mr. Lonsdale," said she; "and now that I am here I have hardly the courage. Promise not to be angry with me."

"I could not be if I tried, dear child," he replied.

Her face flushed, and the light deepened in her eyes.

"You have known me all my life," she said—"have you not?—ever since I came here, a little friendless child."

"Yes, it is true, Eve."

"And you have always been kind to me. I have come to you in a score of childish troubles, and you were always kind to me. Now I want you to let me repay you for all your kindness." She spoke so quickly that he could not interrupt her. "I want to help you. You know that I have money, plenty of money, all lying idle—for I want none, and Aunt Jane will not touch it. Do accept it; let me give it to you. I shall never want it, for I shall never marry. Do take it; you would make me happier than any one in the wide world if you would. I am so grieved and so sorry that I would go out and work for you if you would let me. If you will not accept it, borrow it until you can repay me. Do not refuse me—let me help you."

Felix had come nearer to her, listening in wonder to the passionate words. Mr. Lonsdale drew the fair head down near to him.

"So you would give me all your fortune, Eve?"

There was a glad light in her eyes when she raised them to his.

"I would—double my fortune if I had it," she replied.

"And why, Eve—tell me why you would be so good to me?"

The rich crimson flush burned her fair face; she knew why, but she could not tell him.

"Because I love you all, and you are my dearest friends," she replied.

"And you would give it to me all without reserve, Eve?"

"All, and more if I had it," was her answer; and then there was silence for some minutes, while the fire burned brighter and the north wind wailed.

"My dear Evelyn," said Darcy Lonsdale—and his voice was broken with emotion—"how shall I ever thank you?"

An expression of perfect rapture came over the girl's face.

"You will let me do it?" she cried. "You have made me one of the happiest girls in the world!"

The thin hands clasped hers, and the sunken eyes looked tenderly into hers.

"Will I let you give it to me, my dearest Eve? No—a thousand times no! It is not for the money I am thanking you, but for the thought, for the intention. You have gladdened my heart, you have gladdened my life—you have given me the courage to get better, you have given me hope. I shall be so much the better for your coming."

"But that is not the point!" she cried. "Dear Mr. Lonsdale, do accept the money. Ah, if you knew how little I care for it, and how much I care for you—if you knew the pleasure it would give me, you could not refuse!"

He drew the sweet face down to his, and kissed it.

"My dear Eve, I would rather have this offer made to me than any other. You have restored some of my self-esteem, child, some of my self-respect."

Evelyn looked up in wonder, for Felix had bent down and kissed her hand; he gazed at the sweet, flushed face with wonder.

"Eve," he said, "you are an angel. I shall never forget what you have said and done. I shall never forget that you have given a desponding, almost despairing man, hope."

And again there came to him just a passing wish, a faint fleeting desire, that Violet had shown the same affection for them; but again he checked the thought. Violet was a golden-haired goddess, and goddesses did not go about making offers of their possessions to unfortunate men.

Eve could hardly be comforted because they would not take her money. She did win one promise from Darcy Lonsdale, and that was, that if he saw himself very hardly pushed he would borrow a few hundreds at least to go on with. But, though she had not succeeded in the one great object of her visit, she had at least done good—she left more hopeful hearts behind her.

Later on, when Felix had seen Eve home and Katie had listened with eyes dimmed by tears to the story of her

generosity the family sat around the fire discussing the event.

"I shall get well now, Katie," said Darcy Lonsdale; "yesterday I felt that it was a matter of indifference to me whether I lived or died, and now I have hope. Some persons in the world retain their old faith in me. I shall get well, and, as Evelyn says, I shall live my trouble down."

He had not been so cheerful since the first shadow of the cloud appeared, and from the depths of her heart, Kate Lonsdale blessed the generous girl who had done so much good.

"I wish," she said to herself, "that Felix had chosen Evelyn. I should think of his future with hope if he were going to marry her." For in the depths of Mrs. Lonsdale's loving heart there lurked some little fear of beautiful Violet Haye.

So the winter passed. Mr. Lonsdale recovered his health but slowly; the spring of his life seemed broken—he found living his trouble down more difficult than he had antici pated. He had withdrawn himself from all positions of trust; he gave up his office as church warden, he would no longer be overseer.

"If they could believe that of me," he said, "I will hold no trust among them."

And he did not. What business was brought to his office he did, but he no longer mixed with his fellow-men. He had taken a leading part in all the business of the town; now he was absent from all the meetings, and there was a sense of remorse among his old friends—a slight feeling that perhaps after all they had misjudged him. Still he found life hard. There were times when the brave heart would have given way but for the remembrance that the few nearest and dearest to him had trusted him.

Felix had had his difficulties; he had hastened to the Limes as soon as possible after the receipt of his letter. Francis Haye received him coolly.

"I do not wish," he said, "to part you from Violet—I do not say that the engagement must be broken off; but I do say that the marriage must not take place until you are in a better position to support a wife."

There was nothing then but for Felix to submit; he had to trample down the wild longing, the passionate love, and his sorrow educated him. He learned patience, perseverance, endurance, and self-control. The trial would have been easier to bear had he found that Violet was distressed

about it. He looked in vain for some trace of sorrow on the lovely laughing face—for some sign of regret; there was none. She had written a very pretty note of condolence to Darcy Lonsdale, and when Felix talked to her she shook her golden head and said it was very sad; but when he went to her with his heart full of passionate love, passionate longing and regret, and spoke about their marriage being deferred, she looked very gravely at him and said:

"It cannot be helped, Felix; and, after all, what does it matter? What differnece will a few years make? By not marrying now we both escape the misery of living on limited means."

But he was half mad with his misery, and was not to be put off with such words. He took her white hands in his, and held them in an iron grasp.

"Have you no pity to extend to me?" he cried. "Have you no word to comfort me? Have you no heart? That which is a relief to you is deadly torment, deadly anguish, to me. Oh, Violet, you would have been a truer woman if you had clasped your arms around my neck, if you had laid your face on my shoulder, and consoled me."

The ring of passion in his voice frightened her, as it always did; she shrank with a scared face from the great love she could not understand.

"I have to work and wait," he said. "Oh, my beautiful love, I would work for you as no man has worked, if need should be. It is not that, but I had built up my hopes, and it is hard to see them all destroyed. I had believed that this year I should take my darling home to begin the life that would be joy for me. I am young, and feel keenly; it is a terrible disappointment to me—a terrible blow. Oh, Violet, help me to bear it!"

She raised her beautiful, half-frightened face to his.

"What can I do to help you?" she said.

"Kiss me. I will not have a shy, coy, formal kiss, Violet. Kiss me as though your heart answered mine. Say you are sorry for me, and that you will love me and help me to wait. Say all this—my heart is hungry for it."

She did as he wished. She laid her golden head on his breast and whispered to him that she was sorry for him, and then she raised her fair face and kissed him. In that moment he welcomed pain—it was all changed into untold bliss for him because it won a little kindness from her.

"I shall bear it all now, my darling," he said. "The waiting, the suspense, the uncertainty, the disgrace—I

shall bear it all. I shall remember these moments, and I shall bless the pain that brought me this happiness."

A few moments afterward she looked up and gave a little low laugh.

"How strange it is!" she said. "After all, you know I never quite promised."

Felix smiled. He was too happy just then to think seriously of her words.

"I have given you the greatest love, Violet, that a man can give a woman. You will not give me ashes in return. I have no fear—my heart rests on you. The only thing that I deplore is that months must pass yet before I can call my darling my own; yet I shall wait and work in hope. All things come to him who knows how to wait; and you will come, my beautiful love, in time."

There was something pathetic in his deep love and his great trust.

He left her that evening feeling happier than he had felt for some time. Violet loved him. She had never been so kind to him before. He forgot that he had asked her for the kindness—it had not been spontaneous. "There is a silver lining to every cloud," he thought, as he walked home. "But for this trouble I should never have known how Violet loved me. She was so shy and reserved before, now she is kind and gracious. Sorrow has been my sun—it has brightened my love."

Felix kept his word. He worked hard and denied himself much that makes life bright, but the labor was one of love. He could not see Violet so often as he had seen her—his days were entirely devoted to business—but he went to the Limes in the evening. On the part of Francis Haye there was a sort of armed neutrality. He watched the young lovers, he took care that they should not enjoy many *tete-a-tetes*, but he did not take any active proceedings. He was a worldly man, and after all Felix Lonsdale might accomplish something out in the world. The chances were, all things considered, in his favor. Felix had his consolations in the shape of little love-letters, inclosing violets, forget-me-nots, pretty leaves, or some rare flower—letters that in after years were like strains of half-forgotten music to him. They were very simple letters, but they were far more dear and precious to him than if they had contained gems of poetry and wonders of prose. The arrival of one of them brightened his whole day. How he read and reread it, pondering each word in his mind, to see how much it conveyed, and then locking the letter away at night with

his treasures. In what words of rapture he answered Violet's notes—for he had but one love, Violet; one hope, which was to win Violet; one faith, which was centered in Violet.

So winter wore away, and genial, lovely spring, heralded by snow-drops and crocuses, came to gladden the hearts and souls of men.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR OWEN CHEVENIX.

"Sir Owen Chevenix." The inhabitants of Lilford uttered the name with awe and respect. Those who had never seen Sir Owen made a point of talking about him; while those who had not only seen him, but talked to him, were elevated almost to another sphere. Sir Owen was a man of note. He was that much-to-be-envied person, a millionaire, and he had just purchased the finest estate in Loomshire. It was called Garswood Hall, and lay between Lilford and the town of Oldstone.

There had been great excitement about this property. It had belonged to Lord Garswood, who was chiefly famous for his great love of travel. It was seldom that he spent two years together in England; and now that he had resolved upon living entirely in the east, Garswood Hall, with the grand estate belonging to it, came into the market, and the fortunate purchaser was Sir Owen Chevenix.

Sir Owen had arrived in great state at Garswood. Servants, carriages, horses, grandeur of all kinds, had preceded him. Every one was talking of him. The number of horses in his stables and of servants in his household, the marvels of gold and silver plate at the Hall, the wonders in the shape of magnificent furniture—these things formed the staple of conversation in every house in Lilford. Then came the crowning intelligence, he was not married—this millionaire on whom Fortune had lavished her gifts; and the excitement rose to a great height when this became known. Maids and matrons took the greatest interest in him, the grandees of the county waited upon him, fashionable mothers offered him advice about his household, about the parties he intended giving, and about the people he must invite, while the squires were much interested in his stable and pack of hounds. The younger ladies wondered what he would be like, and which among

them would be the happy one chosen as queen of Garswood.

He must marry; that was very certain—he could not live alone at such a place as Garswood. The matrons looked mysteriously at each other, and said that it was to be hoped he would settle soon; it was so much better for a man to marry young. Sir Owen himself made inquiries about the fairer portion of the population.

"Have you any pretty girls in this part of the world?" he asked one day of Captain Hill, the sporting man *par excellence* of the neighborhood.

"I believe so," he replied—"I have heard people say so. It is not in my line, you understand."

"Exactly Well, it is in mine—and a very pleasant line I find it. The only thing I dreaded in coming hither was that I should find nothing but rustic beauty of the milkmaid sort. I have decided distaste for it, and the fact of the matter is, I am looking out for a beautiful wife."

"It is a very sensible thing to do," said Captain Hill.

"It is all very well," continued Sir Owen, "for philosophers to say there is nothing in beauty. That is all a mistake; every woman ought to be beautiful. I will go so far as this—I would rather marry a woman with great beauty and a thousand faults than a plain woman with the virtues of an angel. I like something pleasant to look at."

And these ideas of the millionaire were soon known throughout the neighborhood. Beauty was at a premium; the plain faces gave up the contest.

Sir Owen Chevenix very soon became the great man of the county. He did not like Oldstone, but he did like Lilford; he had little patience with the gentry, but he liked the sporting squires. He was so lavish in his orders, so extravagant in his expenditures, that the tradesmen of Lilford looked upon him as an especial gift of Povidence, while his coming seemed to have given fresh life to the county.

When the month of blossoms came round Sir Owen was quite settled at Garswood. He had won golden opinions by not going up to town for the season. Now that he was a landed proprietor, he declared his intention of remaining on his land.

He had already attended one or two meetings of different kinds at Lilford, and he received an invitation from Doctor Hunter, the vicar, to attend the annual festival of the school-children, held always in the month of May. At first he had thrown it contemptuously aside. What had

he, the sporting baronet, as he liked to hear himself called, to do with school-children? He sent a check which caused the good vicar to open his eyes. Then, some one having told him that all the *elite* of the neighborhood attended the *fete*, he went.

In a field near the vicarage the school-children played to their hearts' content; while in the vicarage grounds the *elite* enjoyed themselves in quieter fashion. The military band from Oldstone was there, pretty white tents were erected, there were croquet and law tennis, quadrilles for those who liked dancing, and archery for those who enjoyed shooting. Sir Owen Chevenix, having heard that all the pretty girls in the neighborhood would be there, decided on going himself. No one but Doctor and Mrs. Hunter knew of his intention, and they had kept it a secret, intending to surprise their guests. As a matter of course, beautiful Violet Haye was to be there. Evelyn Lester had been invited, and the vicar had discussed with his wife the advisability of sending an invitation to Felix Lonsdale.

"There is a black mark against the whole family," said the vicar, who forgot at times that his gospel was the gospel of peace, and thought more of justice than of mercy. "I do not say that Darcy Lonsdale was guilty of that which was laid to his charge, but there is a mark against him."

"Against the father, David, but not the son," corrected his wife.

"You might as well try to distinguish between husband and wife as between father and son," rejoined the vicar.

"There is another thing," said the diplomatic lady; "we must ask Violet Haye. She is, in truth, the greatest attraction we shall have to offer, and, as they are lovers, I do not quite see how they can be parted on such an occasion."

"I shall do it against my will," remarked the vicar.

"Well, that is far better than not doing it at all," replied Mrs. Hunter. "It will be a kind of test; if we see that people seem shy of Felix Lonsdale, we must not ask him again."

So Felix received an invitation. If he had known how and why it was given to him he would have placed it under his heel and have gone twenty miles in an opposite direction; as it was, it gave him unbounded pleasure. He was to meet Violet; he would spend a whole half-day with her; he would see her beautiful and admired, yet with the proud consciousness that she was his—all his—his promised wife; and when he reached that point in his reflections he re-

membered how she had raised her face to his with the laughing words, "I have not quite promised." Still that meant nothing; there was no truth so sure as Violet's.

The prospect of that one day to be spent with her delighted him. He sat up the greater part of the night, so that by his unusual holiday business might not suffer. It seemed to him the time would never come when he would meet Violet.

Nor had beautiful Violet Haye been unmindful of the coming *fete.* Her father had looked grave over the milliner's bill when it was given to him; but Violet had determined on being queen of the *fete.* Mrs. Brownson, Mrs, Boulders, and Miss Stanley would certainly be there, perhaps even Lady Balfe, and she must be dressed suitably to meet these potentates.

A beautiful costume of white muslin, rich lace, and blue ribbons was provided, with a wonderful little hat that seemed to be made of feathers; and Violet decided that she had never looked so well before. She pictured to herself an easy sovereignty. Eve Lester was the only one she feared, but then Eve was never given to dress and flirtation.

The month of May had never set in more beautifully. The world was all thrilling with new life, the green leaves were springing on the trees, the hedges pink and white with hawthorn, the violets nestling in the fields, the primroses growing in great golden clusters at the foot of the trees; the air was fragrant with the oder of a thousand sweet flowers, all nature glad and bright. To be in the midst of all this beauty, and with Violet, was something for Felix to dream of.

Lovely, laughing May had given her fairest hours for the *fete;* every one was full of congratulations—the sunshine, the music, everything was so beautiful. Felix saw nothing but the bright face of his love. They walked over the smooth green lawns together, and then Violet, turning suddenly to her lover, said:

"Have you heard all the wonderful stories about the new comer, Sir Owen Chevenix?"

"I find but little time for gossip," he replied; "still I have heard that he is wealthy, and likes to spend his money freely."

Violet's face had quite a light upon it as she continued:

"People say that his plate is superb. Felix, I should like to eat my dinner off a golden plate."

"It would be no better for that, Violet," he replied, long-

ing with all his heart to be able to make her such a present. "You know the saying about the dish of herbs?"

"Yes, I know it, but I do not believe in it. How wonderful it must be, Felix, to live in such a grand house, to have so much money and so many luxuries!"

"I know something that I would rather have than all Sir Owen's luxuries," said Felix.

"What is it?" she asked, eagerly.

"Your love, Violet." And she knew that he meant what he said.

CHAPTER X.

"WHAT A HORRIBLE MAN!"

Under one of the spreading elms on the vicarage lawn stood Violet Haye, talking to her lover. They were watching the contest for a silver arrow, enjoying the failures and mistakes which were out of all proportion to the successes. The sunlight fell on her, tinging the golden hair with deeper gold, making the fair flower-like face still more fair, brightening the white dress with golden gleams. As she stood there her crimson lips parted, smiling at the bright scene before her, she looked like a picture of something almost too fair and ethereal for earth. Her lover was near her. For him the *fete* held naught but Violet. He was supposed to be watching the archers—he was looking at Violet. The sunlight was not so fair to him as the light in her eyes. The harmony that came from the whispering wind, the silvery murmur of laughter, the notes of the air that the band was playing held not such music as her voice. Many eyes lingered on the handsome couple under the great elm. Men looked with envy. Many a man there would have given half he had in the world to stand by Violet's side as an accepted suitor. Women looked with jealous admiration; they could say just what they liked about her, they could criticise her dress and her manner, but each one knew she was simply the most beautiful woman present.

The *fete* was at its height. From the meadow came the hearty shouts of the children at play. Suddenly there seemed to be a slight commotion among the guests, and Felix saw the vicar standing with a gentleman who was certainly not remarkable for the handsomeness of his personal appearance, but the vicar seemed to be impressed by

his presence. Then Captain Hill joined them, and the vicar went away, leaving the two men together.

The new-comer, Sir Owen Chevenix, turned to his friend with a smile.

"It is not bad," he said, "but I see nothing that repays me for the trouble of coming."

Captain Hill turned slowly, and motioned to the great elm tree.

"That is the prettiest sight in the grounds," he remarked; and a curious light came over the heavy face of Sir Owen Chevenix as he gazed. At the same time some keen, subtle instinct which he could not understand told Captain Hill that he had acted cruelly.

"You are right," agreed Sir Owen Chevenix, looking intently at Violet—"that is by far the prettiest sight in the grounds. Who is that young lady?"

"Miss Violet Haye," replied the captain. An honest impulse prompted him to add, "She is engaged to Felix Lonsdale," but a subtle sense that such a statement would be displeasing to Sir Owen restrained him.

"Will you introduce me to Miss Haye?" asked the baronet. The light in his eyes had grown lurid; the captain did not like it.

"It would be better for Mrs. Hunter to do that," he replied. "I am not one of Miss Haye's friends."

Sir Owen walked quickly away. There was a look on his face as of earnest purpose, when he saw Mrs. Hunter. She listened to his request, and she wondered at the strange light on his face.

"Introduce you to Miss Haye?" she said. "Of course I will, with the greatest pleasure." Then, oddly, some subtle doubt crossed her mind; but she would not think of it for one moment. Sir Owen Chevenix was the great personage of the entertainment, the great attraction of the *fete*. She must certainly do as he requested. Why not? Violet Haye was a beautiful girl, and it was only reasonable that every one should admire her. So she walked across the lawn with Sir Owen, who was the observed of all observers.

The sun shone just as brightly, there was no cloud in the blue sky, no wail in the sweet western wind; the flowers did not droop or tremble, the leaves did not quiver, as they might have done could they have known what was drawing near.

Neither Violet nor her lover saw the two until Mrs. Hunter spoke.

"Miss Haye," she said, "Sir Owen Chevenix has asked me to introduce him to you."

Violet's face flushed hotly—it was so sudden, it was such a surprise. This was the rich baronet of whom so short a time before she had been speaking with such awe and wonder. She bowed, and murmured a few words—she never remembered what they were; then, as a matter of course, Mrs. Hunter was compelled to introduce Felix. Sir Owen acknowl ed th introduction by a few careless words. The whole scene occurred in the radiant sunlight in the midst of loomin; flowers and happy faces, yet it was the prelude to a te ible tragedy.

"A beautiful day," said Sir Owen to Violet—"a charming scene, too, quite rural, quite pastoral—the kind of thing I like."

But Violet had not recovered her composure. She was quite unused to society, and the consciousness that she was talking to a rich young baronet, the great man of the neighborhood, was for the moment too much for her. He liked her shy, pretty embarrassment. He had been accustomed to women whose eyes met his boldly, who gave him word for word, repartee for repartee; he liked the drooping eyes that showed the long fringed lashes, the downcast face, so attractive in its sweet confusion. Felix made some remark, and again the baronet answered him with a careless word or two.

"I hear that we are to have quadrilles," said Sir Owen to Violet. "Will you favor me with the first, Miss Haye?"

She answered "Yes," because she did not know how to refuse him.

"I had no idea that this kind of thing could be so well managed in a place like Lilford," said Sir Owen. "It inspires me with an idea—I must really give a *fete* at Garswood."

"That would be very pleasant," returned Violet, shyly.

"I would if you were there," thought Sir Owen; "and there you shall be queen of the *fete* if I can manage it." Aloud he said: "Have you seen Garswood, Miss Haye?"

"I have been in the park," replied Violet, "but I have not seen the house."

"There is plenty of room for a *fete* there. I am quite in love with the place myself—it has such fine old trees, such grand oaks and elms, such ferns, and all that kind of thing."

Violet wondered for one moment whether it was fashionable to be always speaking of "that kind of thing," and

why it was that the baronet had such a dearth of ideas. She looked up at him so inquiringly that Sir Owen almost involuntarily said:

"Were you going to ask me anything?"

Her face flushed again, remembering what she had thought. He thought her rich, lovely color going and coming the most attractive thing he had ever seen in his life. To give her time to recover herself he addressed some indifferent remark to Felix.

He was not gifted with any remarkable comeliness, this young baronet to whom fortune had been so kind. He was tall and thin, without any dignity or ease of manner; his gait was awkward, his hands and arms always gave one the impression that they were more than he could manage. His hair was black, his eyes were dark, with furtive expression; he had a dark heavy mustache, which drooped over cruel lips; his face was a strange mixture of moral weakness and brute force. His voice was unpleasant; there was no mellow ring in it, no music; it was high, clear, and shrill; but then he wore a superb diamond pin and diamond rings, his dress was a marvel of the tailor's art, and he had an income of forty thousand a year. What was the grand manly beauty of Antinous, the grace of Apollo, compared with that?

"You will remember you have promised me the first quadrille, Miss Haye. I see Lady Rolfe. I must pay my *devoirs* to her," and with a low bow Sir Owen turned away.

"What splendid diamonds!" cried Violet.

"What a horrible man!" thought Felix.

Violet had been struck with the gems, Felix had been chiefly impressed by the awkward gait and ungainly carriage. He turned to Violet.

"My darling," he said, "why have you promised to dance with that horrible man?"

"Horrible!" cried Violet. "Do you know how rich and how great he is, Felix?"

"That makes him even more horrible—it is so many magnificent gifts wasted. You must not dance with him, Violet, but with me. You are mine—you belong to me. I cannot let you go to him even for one dance—even for five minutes."

Violet laughed.

"I must dance with him now that I have promised, Felix."

"I do not think that I shall be able to endure it, Violet.

I am afraid, if I see his hand touching you, I shall strike it aside."

She laughed again as a child laughs who points a loaded gun for mischief, never dreaming that it may cause sudden death.

"I feel that I ought to have danced that quadrille with you, Felix," she said, "but really I did not know how to refuse. I was quite embarrassed—you must have seen it. How jealous all the other girls will be! How Lady Rolfe will watch me! She said the other day that her daughter, that insipid-looking girl, was far more beautiful than I. She is not, is she, Felix?"

The lips that asked the question were of the loveliest crimson, the eyes that looked into his were like violets steeped in dew, the face smiling before him was like a blush-rose; that the words were foolish never occurred to him.

"My darling, you are more beautiful than any one else," he said. "Violet, you must dance this quadrille with Sir Owen, I suppose?"

"Yes, I must, indeed," she replied.

"It drives me half mad to think of it. Violet, do not look at him as you look at me—do not, do not let him know how sweet your smile is. Oh, Violet, I shall go mad if you do!"

Again she laughed. "You will have to go mad then, Felix, for I cannot dance with him like a stoic, can I?"

"You are mine, Violet. If I had a lovely, rare, and precious lily, should I like every one to touch it and inhale its sweetness? You are my own—you belong to me."

"Here comes Sir Owen," said Violet, cutting short the passionate words. "I shall not be long away from you, Felix," and, laying her white hand on Sir Owen's arm, they went away together.

CHAPTER XI.

"I BELONG TO YOU, FELIX."

As Violet had foreseen, glances of wonder followed her and her companion. Lady Rolfe was bitterly annoyed; here was this girl chosen by Sir Owen, while her own daughters sat unnoticed. Mrs. Hunter did not know whether to be glad or sorry; of course it was a great thing to have Sir Owen there, and to see him enjoy himself and evidently feel so perfectly at home, but Sir Owen should

have danced with Miss Rolfe, certainly not with Violet Haye.

Sir Owen, however, was grandly indifferent; a man possessed of forty thousand per annum is master of almost every situation, and he certainly was master of this. He enjoyed the quadrille very much.

"I had no idea *al fresco* dancing was so pleasant," he said, "but dancing anywhere with you, Miss Haye, would be the same, I should imagine. Who was that gentleman talking to you under the tree?"

"That is Mr. Felix Lonsdale," she replied. And he fancied the warm blush that came over her face was the result of his compliment.

"Lonsdale! Is not that the name of the lawyer who forged a will, or something of that kind?" asked Sir Owen.

She looked up at him, horrified by the words.

"You are making a grave mistake, Sir Owen," she said. "Mr. Lonsdale was falsely accused of having influenced one of his clients to leave him money, but it was not true."

"True or not, I wish that I were in his place," said Sir Owen.

"Why?" she asked, in wonder.

"Because you defend him. I wonder if you heard evil spoken of me whether you would defend me?"

"Do people speak evil of you?" she asked.

"I suppose so," was the careless relpy; "not that I care. Why should I care? Nothing of that kind matters to me. But I know they tell queer stories about me. They say I drink and gamble—they say that I— But I forgot—I must not repeat scandal to you. Now if you heard these things said of me, would you defend me?"

"How can I answer you? You forget that I have never seen you before."

"Yet you defend this Lonsdale. Do you know him?"

"The Mr. Lonsdale who has suffered so unjustly is the father of the gentleman to whom you saw me speaking," she replied, "and he is one of the oldest friends I have in Lilford."

"I suppose," said the baronet, "that Lonsdale's son imagines himself a very handsome man. That kind of man always thinks a great deal of himself."

"Do you think him handsome?" asked Violet, who knew that her lover had the statuesque beauty of a Greek god.

"I never waste one thought on a man's face," he replied.

But Violet's quick instinct told her that the awkward baronet was jealous of the young lawyer.

Then the quadrille was over, but he would not leave her. She must go with him to have some refreshment—he was sure she felt tired. If he had only known, he would have sent all kinds of choice fruits over for the *fete*, but how could he foresee that the queen of society herself was to be present?

It was all flattery, but very pleasant flattery, when offered by a man worth forty thousand per annum. It was pleasant, too, to know that every one was looking at her, every one was thinking and talking about her. She could not help contrasting her present position with that she had occupied half an hour previously.

Felix Lonsdale had been but coldly received. No one seemed to forget that he was the son of a man whose fair fame was darkened by a dark cloud. The *elite* had not received him very kindly. Lady Rolfe had passed him with a bow; Mrs. Brownson had held out two fingers for him to shake, and had drawn them back very quickly; Mrs. Boulders had shaken hands with him and then looked round very quickly to see if any one had observed her. He had not been "cut;" no one had been pointedly uncivil, but he had been coldly received, and Violet had observed it even more keenly than he had himself, when she stood talking to him. She had a strange feeling as though she were in some manner sharing his disgrace—as though she, too, were under a cloud.

Now it was so different. Sir Owen's glory seemed to be reflected on her; people who had never troubled themselves to speak to her before now were fulsomely polite to her. It was but reflected glory, she knew; still it was very pleasant.

Sir Owen insisted on her taking some refreshment; he waited upon her as though she had been a princess; she could not tell how it was, but she seemed suddenly to have left far behind her the world of sorrow, pain, and disgrace in which, through sympathy with Felix, she had been living so long.

"Here is your friend," said Sir Owen; and, looking up suddenly, she saw Felix at the entrance of the tent looking wistfully at her.

At first something like impatience vexed her. It was such a magnificent triumph for her, he might let her enjoy it—he might have waited a few minutes. It was not every day that she was waited upon by a rich baronet and envied

by other women; she might never see Sir Owen again, while all her life was to be spent with Felix. Surely he might have waited a few minutes longer; but no, he was coming to her, and her triumph was ended, she had no idea of resisting his will, and arose from her seat. Sir Owen looked at her in amazement.

"Are you going?" he asked. "I was just about to presume to ask if you would go with me to see the flowers, they have some very fine ones here, I am told."

She looked helplessly from one to the other. She did not know how to refuse such a tempting offer from Sir Owen, it would be an unequaled triumph for all the guests to see her—to see how proud and pleased he was to escort her through the grounds; but it seemed equally impossible to leave Felix, who had looked forward with such delight to this holiday with her. So the beautiful eyes glanced first at one and then at the other, while the white fingers toyed with the pretty flowers she held up until their scented leaves fell on the ground. Felix cut the Gordian knot for her.

"Pardon me for the interruption," he said. "Miss Haye was kind enough to promise me that honor."

He took Violet's hand, placed it on his arm, and led her from the tent.

The baronet stood looking after them with more than amazement in his face.

"What unequaled impertinence!" he said. "The father of such a man as that would be capable of forging half a dozen wills."

"Oh, Felix," said Violet, "I am afraid you have offended him!"

"I do not care if I have, Violet. You are mine. What right has he to monopolize you? I know we are not married; but it is almost the same thing. You are my promised wife, and no one shall take you away from me even for one hour. Come away from all these people—I want to talk to you. Come down this avenue of chestnuts."

He mastered her by his stronger will; she went without one word. They walked slowly down the avenue of chestnuts, the sunlight glancing on her golden hair and white dress.

"Let me look at you, Violet," he cried, with the passionate impatience of a young lover. "It seems to me that that man's presence near you must have dimmed your beauty as poisonous air kills a delicate flower. Let me look at you, my darling."

He held her hand, and stood looking at her, watching the radiant face with such love in his eyes that a woman must have had a marble heart to resist him.

"No," he said; "you are just the same. You must humor my fancies, Violet. Does not some one say that 'great love is semi-madness?' It is true. You must humor my fancies, sweet. Stand here; let this cool breeze blow over you—it will purify you from even the very breath and echo of his words."

She laughed a low, tremulous laugh, but the words touched her. She stood quite still, and the western wind kissed her face, played with her golden hair, showered the chestnut blossoms over her.

"You shall not even have the echo of another man's words hanging over you, sweet," he said. "Now the breeze has taken it all away."

"Oh, Felix, how much you love me! It makes me tremble to think of it."

"You do not understand it even yet," he replied.

As she walked by her lover's side she could not help feeling the contrast. Who would ever—who could ever love her as this man did? Who in the whole wide world, she thought, had ever been so loved except herself? The memory of his words thrilled her; they stirred the inmost depths of her soul. How he loved her, this handsome, noble-hearted man! His very heart, his soul and life, seemed wrapped up in her.

Even as she felt these things she could not help noticing the difference. When she had crossed the lawn with Sir Owen she had met nothing but bows, smiles, glances of admiration, ill-concealed envy and wonder. Now that she was once again with Felix no one noticed her, no one spoke to her. It was like being in a different world.

Sir Owen had been asked to play croquet, and had refused. He had taken a bird's-eye view of the party—four old maids and a hopeless schoolgirl. It was not in his line, he assured Mrs. Hunter. He would not engage himself in any particular way; he would only linger and wait, watching for the next glimpse of the beautiful face that had set his heart and brain on fire.

He saw her at last, standing with Felix watching the players at lawn-tennis, and the next moment he was by her side. Lady Rolfe, eying him, whispered to Mrs. Hunter:

"Sir Owen seems to be infatuated with Violet Haye. Some one should tell him she is engaged. Dear Mrs. Hunter, would you mind saying that I should like to speak to

him?" And she smiled a well-satisfied smile when she saw the vicar's wife deliver her message.

"You wished to speak to me?" said Sir Owen, approaching Lady Rolfe, with an air of ill-concealed impatience.

She saw that he looked annoyed, and had recourse to her favorite weapon—flattery.

"If it is permitted to an elderly lady like myself to feel jealous I certainly am jealous. We are old friends of nearly two months' standing, yet you have not spent five minutes with me. Sit down here, and give me your views about the *fete*."

Ungraciously enough he took a seat by her side. She saw him look with angry eyes at Felix and Violet; but Lady Rolfe was a woman with a purpose. It took much to daunt her.

"I have no views," he declared, angrily. "I am quite tired of people with views."

"Clever men are all alike," remarked her ladyship, and his face softened a little at the words. "At least we have had a beautiful day," she said, "and beautiful music."

He could not deny it, or he would have done so. She continued:

"This is the first time that you have met your new friends and neighbors together. Do you like them?"

"They are very much like other people," he sneered.

"You are sarcastic," cried her ladyship. "It is very wrong, but I really adore sarcasm."

His face relaxed just a trifle more. She watched him intently. He was worth some trouble; for as soon as he had entered the neighborhood she had resolved upon marrying her daughter to him.

"There are some nice girls here," said her ladyship—"some very pretty girls—Violet Haye for one."

Then his face brightened. She had touched on a happy theme at last.

"Violet Haye is quite the queen of the *fete*," she continued. "There are few, if any, who can compare with her."

"There is not one," he said, and in her heart her ladyship disliked him for the words.

"Perhaps you are right," she allowed, calmly. "I do not know who could really be said to be like her. She is a fortunate girl, too. She has no great fortune, and no connections, yet she is engaged to be married to that handsome young Mr. Lonsdale."

"Engaged to marry him!" cried Sir Owen, with an angry

scowl. "A girl like that engaged to marry the son of a man who has been tried for perjury, or forgery, or something of the kind!"

Lady Rolfe laughed lightly, and touched him on the arm with her fan.

"Nay, nay; it was not so bad as that. Poor Mr. Lonsdale was innocent enough; but she is to marry his son—the wedding-day is fixed, and they will be a very handsome pair. She will marry him, I hear, in the spring."

"That accounts for it," he said, and the heavy black mustache drooped over as cruel lips as were ever seen on a man's face.

"Accounts for what?" asked Lady Rolfe, with a great assumption of innocence.

"Oh, nothing in particular! But I thought he seemed to consider that he had some kind of right to her."

And then, looking at him, Lady Rolfe saw a stern, cruel, set expression settle on his face.

"So they are to be married in the spring, are they?" he asked, slowly. "I suppose this young Lonsdale is very proud of her?"

"What a question to ask me, Sir Owen! He is a man, and has eyes. I should not think it would be possible to tell how much he loved her."

"Does she care for him?" he asked, quickly.

"Dear me, yes. Care for him! Why, it is a love-match. She cares very much for him and for no one else besides."

He asked no more questions, but Lady Rolfe, still watching him intently, saw that the set, firm look deepened every moment on his face. She could not tell whether she had done right or wrong. She had told him that the girl was engaged and that it was quite useless for him to think of her; but what did that look mean? Like every one else who had any part in naming Violet Haye to Sir Owen that day, she had an uneasy feeling about it.

Sir Owen seemed to think that he had done all that was required of him. He rose from his seat, and left her ladyship with a bow.

"He will go to Lavinia now," thought Lady Rolfe. "He will waste no more time over Violet Haye."

But Lavinia beamed upon him in her superb costume of mauve silk all in vain—he passed her with a careless bow. The moments seemed to him hours before he should be near Violet Haye again.

It was well for his popularity that no one saw the lower-

ing, angry expression of his face as he crossed the croquet lawn.

"I would have her if I wanted her," he said to himself, "if every other man on earth laid claim to her, and if I had to fight them all."

Lady Rolfe had unconsciously done the very thing to defeat her own purpose. The fact which would have made Violet sacred to another man simply urged him on. It would be a triumph to win her, because so many others admired her; but it would be a double triumph if she was engaged to another man. Sir Owen often congratulated himself on his perfect freedom from what he was pleased to call "affected nonsense;" and he was never more free from it than in this case. If, besides winning Miss Haye for himself, he could add to that the triumph of making her break an engagement to another, it would be the greatest success of his life.

"She is beautiful enough to be a queen," he said, "and it would take a hundred lawyers to frighten me. A man with forty thousand a year ought to be able to do as he likes. If he cannot what is the use of money?"

He went at once to Violet, and Felix, standing by her side, longed to lift him up in his strong arms and throw him over the bridge.

"Miss Haye," he said, quite ignoring the presence of her lover, "do you live here in Lilford?"

She appeared half frightened as she answered him:

"Yes—I live at the Limes."

His face cleared.

"I know it," he went on. "It is a pretty little place just outside Lilford. I have often admired it. Does your father hunt?"

"No—he is quite an invalid," replied Violet, half longing that Sir Owen would leave her, and half enjoying the distinction that his great notice of her brought.

"Ah, an invalid—very unfortunate! Not able to leave the house often, I suppose?"

"No—not often," replied the girl, looking at her lover's averted face.

"I shall be glad to see him sometimes," said Sir Owen; "he has no objection to visitors, I suppose?"

"No," replied Violet; "he is pleased to receive any."

"Then, with your permission and his, I will ride over to-morrow," said Sir Owen.

He waited for her reply. Violet made none. She was frightened at the expression on her lover's face.

"You do not say that I shall be welcome, Miss Haye," he added, impatiently.

She recovered herself. After all she was doing no wrong.

"We shall be pleased to see you, Sir Owen," she told him, with quiet dignity; and then the baronet, finding there was no chance of further conversation with her, went away.

"My darling," cried Felix, "do not be at home to-morrow when he comes. I do not like him, Violet—he has a cruel, bad face, and there is an evil light in his eyes. I do not like him, sweet."

"I wonder why he has paid me so much attention," she said, "and why he is coming to see us?"

But Felix was too wise to answer that question. He only clasped the little hands in his own. To him this girl, in her beauty and innocence, was little less than an angel.

"My white dove," he said—"my pure, sweet love, never mind him. Promise me that when he or any other man comes to you with flattering words, you will say, 'I am pledged to my lover—I am pledged to Felix Lonsdale.' Will you say that, Violet?"

"Yes, I will," she replied.

"Would that I could take you away from them all, and keep you safely under the shelter of my own great love, Violet! You will not be in to-morrow when he comes? Promise me, my darling—do you not see that I am half mad with jealousy?—promise me you will go out. If I knew that to-morrow he would sit by your side, touch your hand, look into your beautiful face, I think that I should shoot him to-night!"

"Oh, Felix, what a dreadful thing to say!"

"Jealousy is like fire—it destroys all things," he said; "but I am foolish to be jealous. I have all faith in you, sweet—all faith. Say once again, 'I belong to you, Felix.'"

The sun shone on her fair face as he raised it to his; the wind stirred the leaves as she said:

"I belong to you, Felix."

CHAPTER XII.

"HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD."

The *fete* was over, but people still talked of it—of the unexpected appearance of Sir Owen Chevenix and his admiration for beautiful Violet Haye. Violet had said but little at home; she had told her father that the baronet in-

tended to come to see him, and Francis Haye had looked up in bewilderment.

"Coming to see me!" he cried. "What is that for?"

He did not see the hot flush on his daughter's face. She knew well enough why he was coming.

"If it is about that right of road," he continued, "he may save himself the trouble, for I shall never give in—never."

"You will see what he is coming for when he comes," said Mrs. Haye; "there is nothing so absurd as guessing. I shall not believe it until I do see him."

Then after talking eagerly of his boundless wealth, the beauty of his estate, the number of his horses, Francis Haye exclaimed:

"And to think that he should come to see us!"

Violet remembered her promise; she knew that Sir Owen would probably call about one o'clock. Soon after noon she put on her garden hat, and, without saying a word, went out into the woods where no one could see her, and no servant could be sent after her. She sat there thinking—thinking of how Felix loved her, and how sweet it was to be loved—telling herself that she would not exchange his love for the world.

Why did he dislike Sir Owen so much? Why was he so anxious for her to be away during the baronet's visit? She had never loved Felix better than she did that morning, as she sat thinking of him; her heart warmed to him—his great love had touched her at last. She would not go back home until after two; the baronet could not prolong his visit beyond an hour, she thought.

As she entered the house she saw her mother watching eagerly for her at the dining-room window. She went to her at once. The moment she opened the door she heard the baronet's voice.

"Good-morning, Miss Haye. I was just saying that, after my long ride over, I would not go away without seeing you, if I had to stop here until midnight."

She looked up at him in simple surprise.

"I thought that it was my father you wanted to see, Sir Owen."

He laughed; he was somewhat disconcerted at her answer.

"Did you not see that that was my excuse for coming to see you?" he said.

Violet turned away, while Francis Haye and his wife looked at each other. The baronet sat down again; nor

did he leave until long after three. He talked of all kinds of things which he thought would interest Francis Haye. His least word was listened to with intense admiration by those children of Mammon. Then, after promising to send grapes and choice fruit, after offering all kinds of favors, he went away. Violet was compelled to go to the garden gate with him. He asked her, and Mrs. Haye answered for her.

"What a very good-natured, friendly neighbor!" said Francis Haye, as he, with his wife, watched the baronet mount his horse.

His wife turned to him with a face that quivered with agitation.

"He is worth forty thousand a year—forty thousand! If you are a wise man you will not say one word, Francis Haye—not one word; if you do, you will spoil it all."

So when Violet returned, half dreading the debate that she felt sure must follow, there was no reference made to the baronet or his visit save that, in general terms, her father expressed himself much gratified. The only perceptible difference was that the girl's parents treated her with even greater deference and affection than before.

That night—it was a lovely night in May—Violet, sitting with her parents, heard a signal that she knew well.

There was a quick beating of her heart, a thrill ran through her veins—Felix was outside.

"How the leaves tap the window!" said Mrs. Haye. "It is growing late; we will have the shutters closed."

Violet hastened away, ostensibly to see that her mother's wishes were obeyed, but in reality to see if Felix were outside.

How lovely the night was! The world lay calm and smiling under the light of the moon; the soft breeze brought the scent of the pink hawthorn in the hedges, of the clover in the meadows, of the violets in the woods. Violet went quietly out, and there, by the great lilac bushes, stood Felix. She had no time to remonstrate, for he had clasped her in his arms as though nothing but death could part them.

"Did I frighten you, sweet? I hope not—I have but five minutes to spare."

"Will you not come into the house, Felix?" she asked.

"No. I have but five minutes, and I want to spend them with you. I ought not to have run over, but I could not help it—I could not rest. I want to know if you saw that man to-day, and what he said to you. Yes, I know" he

continued, "that I am jealous. Never mind that, sweet. Jealousy is a consuming fire. I could not rest, I could not sleep. I have tasted no food—my very life has seemed to be leaving me. I felt that I must run over, that I must hold you in my arms, kiss your lips, hear you say that you love me, or the fire would destroy me."

Once more his great love mastered her—once more the mighty passion in him seemed to make her strong and noble by example.

"Tell me about it, sweet," he said.

Looking into his handsome face, his lovelit eyes, she could not say many words which would hurt him.

"There is little to tell you, Felix," she replied. "I went out soon after twelve; I did not return until after two. Then he was still here. He went away soon afterward."

"Did he talk much to you, Violet?"

"No; he talked to my father," she answered.

He drew her nearer to him.

"He has not taken one thought, one word, one look, one smile from me, has he, sweet? Oh, my darling, if I could but take you where your beauty could gladden no eyes but my own! It seems to me, Violet, that this fever of longing is burning my heart away. Will the longed-for time never come?"

"Yes, it will come," she replied; and this time she did not add her usual remark—"I have not quite promised, you know."

She was sorry for him. She could not quite understand his feelings, but she had some dim perception of what he suffered, of the torture of his love and jealousy, of the greatness of his love. She saw such pain in his face and in the trembling of his lips that she did what she had never voluntarily done before—she caressed him of her own free will; she laid her hand on the clustering hair, and drew his face down to hers. She turned her sweet lips to him.

"You need not fear, Felix," she whispered. "I love you—no one but you!"

"That was worth walking a hundred miles for," he said. "If you are so kind to me, Violet, I am afraid that I shall run over every night. I would work all day and walk all night for the chance of hearing such words."

The dew was falling, and the fragrance of the lilac floated round them.

"I must not stay, Felix," she murmured.

"No; I will not ask you. My darling, say only once more

to me the words I love to hear—say, 'Felix, I belong to you.' Say it, Violet!" he added, with sudden passion.

"Felix, I belong to you," she whispered, and he was content. He touched the lilac flowers with his hand.

"Darling," he said, "I shall love every lilac that blooms because it will remind me of this night and of you. See, there are dew-drops on your hair! You must not stay, sweet; you must go in, Violet. You will repeat my name before you sleep to-night, and when you wake? You will say, 'Felix—I love Felix, and will be true to him.'"

"Yes," she answered.

He touched the little golden chain that she wore round her neck.

"I wish I were that chain. I wish I were this golden ring of hair that lies on your face. I wish—oh, Violet, I am mad with wishing—mad with longing. But I love you so dearly."

In another minute he was gone. The moon was shining, the dew lay upon the lilacs, and Violet stood alone, her heart beating as it had never beaten before.

"After all, it is better to be loved than to be rich," she thought—"it is better to have love than riches. I—I wish that I had always been kinder to Felix; but I did not think—I did not understand."

She stood for some minutes while the western wind cooled the hot flush on her face, and she became calmer as she watched the pale light of the moon.

"There is nothing like love," she repeated; "and there never yet was any love like his for me."

If the girl's father and mother suspected anything they made no sign, they said no word, and Violet was grateful.

It happened three days later that Felix, finding he had a leisure hour in the afternoon, went over to the Limes. He took with him a little bouquet of roses; they were the first choice ones that he had seen, and he knew that Violet loved roses. He found her at home, and he was received with civility, though not with warmth, by her parents. Violet was pleased with the roses. She praised them—she buried her face in them, and Felix wished with all his heart that he were one of them.

While he sat there a box came from the Hall. Francis Haye was excited about it. It must be opened at once—he could not imagine what it contained. Felix offered to help, and his offer was eagerly accepted. The first thing they saw was a magnificent bouquet—such as had never been seen in Lilford—the conservatories must have been robbed

to provide it. There were camellias, red and white, gardenias, stephanotis, white heath, heliotrope, lemon-scented verbena—the rarest and loveliest flowers that grew. A little white card was at the side of it—a card which bore the hackneyed quotation, "'Sweets to the sweet.' For Miss Haye, with Sir Owen Chevenix's compliments."

Violet gave a little cry of delight when she saw it. Mrs. Haye took it up in her hands, and, turning it round, said, in a most impressive voice:

"This is worth five guineas, at least."

Then they uncovered several bunches of superb grapes, some fine peaches and apricots—delicacies such as previously Violet had only heard mentioned—also a dozen bottles of choice Madeira for Mr. Haye.

"It is very kind of him," said Francis Haye—"wonderfully kind. I have never met with any one so generous."

And Felix, who was far above all ignoble jealousy, joined in praise of the baronet. But when Violet stood at the garden gate alone with him he said, half sadly:

"What does it all mean, Violet? I cannot understand it." For to his mind—so brave, so noble, so incapable of meanness or wrong—it had not yet occurred that any man could deliberately try to take his betrothed wife from him. He would have scorned the notion—he never even suspected it, until it was too late. But, as he stood there—and it was only natural—there came to him for a moment a passionate longing for wealth. If he could only make such presents as those he had just helped to unpack!

"Violet," he said, half sadly, "I am afraid my roses seem very poor and trifling by the side of all Sir Owen's magnificence. My darling, if I could coin my heart's blood into gold, and lavish it upon you, I would do so. My poor roses!"

She laughed a low, rippling laugh, that sounded very sweetly to him.

"Those beautiful flowers will stand in mamma's favorite old china bowl," she said. "Look where one of your roses is," pointing to the bodice of her dress; "they shall change places if you like."

A passionate embrace was Felix Lonsdale's only response, and as he walked home that night he felt that he was the happiest man in the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RIDE HOME.

There was no place in England prettier than the old parish church at Lilford. It was an old Norman edifice, with quaint square towers and a harmonious peal of bells. The church stood on rising ground, and behind it was a grove of oak trees—fine old spreading oaks, that had seen many generations of men and women come and go. Great green hills stretched out on either side—hills with quiet little hamlets nestling on their wooded slopes; little old-world villages were dotted around, and the old church stood up royally on the hill-side. The walls were gray, and covered with ivy; the old windows were of stained glass; ivy covered the square towers; the old porch with its stone seat was a marvel of architecture; the path that led to it was bordered by lime trees; look where one would one saw nothing but ripples of foliage and a gold-green light.

Sunday in Lilford was a day that would have charmed a poet. The very spirit of peace and rest seemed to brood over the earth, while the sweet chime of the Sabbath bells sounded through the venerable oaks.

So long as he could remember Felix always walked home with Violet from church; when they were children they ran down the hills in very gladness of heart, but now they walked sedately, Felix almost forgetting the beauty of the fair world around him, as he looked into the beautiful face of the young girl by his side—Violet faintly conscious of the admiring glances that came from all sides, yet really trying with all her heart to disregard them because it was Sunday.

It would hardly have seemed like Sunday to Felix if his privilege had been withdrawn. He went, as usual, on the first Sunday in June, when the old church was looking its fairest and the sunlight on the oak trees was wonderful to see. There was Violet, her beautiful face shining, he thought, like the face of an angel; there was Evelyn, looking like a fair, meek saint. Great was his surprise to see Sir Owen Chevenix also. It was the first time that he had made his appearance at church, and the congregation was just a little excited about it. Doctor Hunter, on seeing him

there, fondly fancied that it was due to the fame of his effective preaching. Lady Rolfe suspected that the charming Lavinia had lured him there, but the vicar's wife, shrewd Mrs. Hunter, sighed and smiled. "It is the old, old story," she said to herself; and then she reproached herself for the thought, and applied herself to the Psalms.

Felix did not think much about the matter. He was not ashamed to bow his handsome head, and join with all his heart in the beautiful words of the service; but when it was all over he hastened to meet Violet. She was standing with her mother, and, to his surprise, Sir Owen Chevenix was talking to them. He gave a careless nod to Felix, but continued talking.

"I beg that you will let me drive you home, Mrs. Haye," he was saying. "To tell you the truth, I ordered my carriage on purpose—I did, indeed. It is a lovely morning, and if you will permit it, we will drive around by Queen's Ash."

He did not look at Violet as he spoke. He knew that whatever her mother did she must do. Felix had taken her hand. He did not care if all the world heard what he had to say.

"You will not break through the old custom of walking home with me, Violet, or rather of allowing me to walk home with you?"

She looked from one to the other with real distress in her face. Sir Owen did not even glance at her; he knew that his cause was safe in Mrs. Haye's hands.

"Violet," said Felix, "you cannot hesitate," and the girl stood looking at him while her mother said:

"Really I do not know what answer to give you, Sir Owen. I do not know what people will say."

"Why, what does that matter, Mrs. Haye?"

"Well, you see, Sir Owen, Lilford is a small place, and 'everybody' knows 'everything.'"

"My dear lady, what can it matter if all the world knows of this? I shall be very proud of the honor, I assure you. Lady Rolfe would not require so much pressing."

The last words, vulgar as was the spirit which dictated them, quite determined Mrs. Haye. Evidently, if she did not go with him, he would drive Lady Rolfe and her daughter. She simpered a little.

"Since you are so kind, we will accept your offer," she said. "It will certainly be very pleasant. I always tell Haye that the one thing I want to make me perfectly happy is a carriage. Now, Violet."

"Violet will allow me to escort her, Mrs. Haye," suggested Felix.

"Oh, no," replied Mrs. Haye, "Violet must come with me. I cannot go alone and leave Violet with you. Another time, Felix, you shall be her escort. Sir Owen has been kind enough to order his carriage for us; it would be really impolite to refuse. We will say good-morning to you now." And she watched him while he shook hands first with her and then with Violet.

His handsome young face had grown white even to the lips; but what could he do? He was a gentleman; he could not make a "scene;" he could not take the girl from her mother's side against her will; he had no carriage with roan steeds, and coachman and footmen in livery. What could he do? Only one thing. If Violet was to go in the carriage he himself would put her into it. The baronet's hand should not touch even his darling's dress.

So he walked by her side down the avenue of limes, and they reached the high road where the carriage stood. There were many curious eyes watching them. Lady Rolfe and the fair Lavinia looked on in angry indignation.

"What does that girl mean by encouraging Sir Owen?" said the mother. "Surely one lover ought to be enough for her. Felix Lonsdale must be blind."

"Perhaps he cannot help himself, mamma," returned the philosophical daughter, and in that she was right.

When Felix had helped Violet into the carriage he bent over her to arrange her dress.

"Darling, you would sooner have walked home with me, would you not?"

"Yes, I would," she replied, and after that the disappointment was not quite so hard to bear. He had one satisfaction; he turned away without a word or a bow to Sir Owen.

"This is pleasant," said Mrs. Haye, as the carriage rolled swiftly along the high-road. "Violet, of all the luxuries of life give me a carriage."

The luxury and grandeur were certainly very pleasant, while the novelty delighted Violet.

Sir Owen did nothing to alarm her. He talked to Mrs. Haye, while he merely looked at Violet. He was wonderfully solicitous that she should be comfortable, and there was but one drawback to Violet's pleasure, the memory of the pain on her lover's face.

"How I wish Felix had a carriage!" she said to herself. "But that will never be."

She enjoyed her father's surprise when the horses stopped at the Limes, and she wondered what her mother meant when she said:

"If I had a chance of keeping such a carriage as that I should not lightly throw it away."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BALL-DRESS.

It was a bright day in June, the lilies and roses were all in flower, the laburnums were in the full perfection of their golden glory, and again the sun at noonday found Sir Owen at the Limes. He had discovered Violet in the garden dreaming idly among the roses. It was a pictur esque, old-fashioned garden, with quaint-looking seats under the trees and a pretty arbor of trellis-work in the background. Sir Owen professed himself so charmed with it that he would not go into the house, and Mr. and Mrs. Haye went out to meet him there.

After the first greetings were over he turned to Violet.

"Miss Haye," he said, "I have come on purpose to see you. Do you remember our conversation about a *fete* in the park? You said that you thought it would be very pleasant."

Violet looked up with animation.

"Yes, I remember now," she replied. "I had forgotten it."

"I have come to say that if it pleases you I will give orders for everything to be prepared for it. What do you say?"

She looked at him with a curious expression on her face, while her father and mother glanced at each other.

"What do I say?" she echoed. "I have nothing to say, Sir Owen, but that I have no doubt it will be very pleasant."

Sir Owen looked disconcerted. After a pause he added:

"But you do not understand. If I give the *fete* at all it will be in your honor and to please you. Everything in it shall be as you wish—you shall choose your own amusements—indeed, you shall be the queen of it. Now what do you say?"

Mrs. Haye frowned at her daughter.

"You must really show some little interest in it, Violet," she said, "since Sir Owen is so good as to consult you."

"'Consult'—that is just the right word, Mrs. Haye—thank you. That reminds me," he added, with a smile,

"Lady Rolfe told me to consult her when I found myself in any difficulty."

Violet looked up with an air of great relief.

"I wish you would," she said. "She knows far more about such matters than I do."

"But you see it is your opinion I want, not hers," said Sir Owen. "I thought of this—a *fete* in the park, and, to wind up with, a grand ball in the house. We could have Pearson's quadrille band from London; and I thought of sending to Gunter for the supper. What do you think of it?"

Her beautiful face paled a little and then flushed.

"I think it would be most delightful," she replied.

"Though Mr. Haye is an invalid, still he would like to see everything going on," continued Sir Owen. "Perhaps he, Mrs. Haye, and yourself would come to the Hall on the day before the *fete*, and stay until the day after."

"I should like it very much," declared Mr. Haye. "I have not had such a treat for years."

"Nor have I," said his wife. "I cannot imagine anything that I should like better."

After that Violet could raise no objections.

"But you must grant me one favor," continued Sir Owen —"you must promise to open the ball with me."

Again the girl's beautiful face flushed and paled, but her mother looked impatiently at her.

"Why do you hesitate, Violet?" she said. "It is an honor of which any lady in the county might be proud."

"You consent, then?" pursued Sir Owen.

"Yes, I am willing," she replied, inwardly dreading all that Felix would say about it, yet half delighted with the idea.

"And I have your sanction for all that I do. Is there anything you wish to suggest in the way of improvement?"

"No, I think not," she replied, more than half frightened.

"What do you say to Tuesday week?" he asked. "Then I can drive over here, and take you all to Garswood on the Monday. Lady Rolfe will stay two days; we shall be quite a pleasant little party. I may rely upon you?"

"Yes," agreed Violet, still somewhat nervous; then, looking up at him quite suddenly, "Why do you set store by my opinion and sanction?" she asked. "I do not know anything of these matters; I do not understand why you consult me."

Sir Owen laughed a loud, hearty laugh that was music to the ears of Francis Haye and his wife.

"I have a reason," he replied, "and a very serious one; I will speak to you about it later on."

She could not imagine to what he alluded, and Mrs. Haye listened in silence.

Sir Owen showed her a list of names.

"I thought of sending invitations to these people," he said. "If there are any among them you do not like, strike them out; if there are any you wish to ask, add them."

She read the long list of names, and then produced her little pencil-case; she added two more—those of Evelyn Lester and Felix Lonsdale.

"That is her lover," thought Sir Owen, as he looked reflectively at them. "Well, he may come—it will save trouble. When he sees all that he will see, he will be taught a lesson."

Violet was more pleased and contented when he smiled. She did not know why she felt so greatly relieved.

Then Sir Owen rose to take his leave; he was going to London that evening, he said, and it would be some days before he would see them again. He asked Violet to go with him to the garden gate; and again, when Mrs. Haye saw the peculiar expression on her husband's face, she whispered:

"Not one word, Francis Haye, not one word, or you will spoil it all," and he obediently held his peace.

They saw a look of perplexity on Violet's beautiful face all that day, and she had lost her animation. She fell into long fits of musing; she was unlike herself; but no word from father or mother helped her in her difficulty, or solved her doubts.

Felix had been quite pleased about his invitation; he smiled, and thought to himself how foolish he had been. What could be more natural than that Sir Owen should admire his beautiful Violet? He could not help it; he told himself that he had been unreasonably jealous, that here was a proof of it. If Sir Owen had entertained any false, dishonorable notion of supplanting him in Violet's affections, here was a proof that he had changed his mind. Another and more generous idea still came to him—namely that Sir Owen had not known at first that Violet was engaged, and hence had admired her; but, that, now that he did know it, he had changed his ideas.

"Some one has told him," thought generous Felix, "and that is why he invites me."

This noble-hearted man could not imagine a fellow-man holding out one hand with a smile, while he clutched a dagger in the other. He was sorry for having misjudged him, and thought to himself that on the day of the *fete* he would seek out Sir Owen, and shake hands with him. So, to Violet's great relief, there was no cloud on his face when he told her that he would be pleased to attend the *fete*.

But he looked very thoughtful when Violet told him of the invitation.

"I do not want to go," she said—"I do not like Lady Rolfe; besides, I do not see the use of making friends with all these great people—it cannot last."

"You really do not care to go there, Violet?" he asked.

"No, not to the Hall. I shall enjoy the *fete*, but I shall not enjoy the visit."

Felix drew near to her.

"Violet," he whispered, "you will not think me jealous or disagreeable?"

"No," she replied.

"I want you to do something for me. I am puzzled. Sometimes I think Sir Owen must know that we are engaged—sometimes I fancy he does not; yet he must know."

"I should imagine that he does know—every one round here knows; he would be sure to hear it spoken of."

"Most probably. But, Violet, let us make sure of it—tell him yourself, sweet. He will be quite sure to talk to you, and it will be so easy; just a few little words, and then all my suspense will be ended—indeed I have not felt at all anxious about it, since this invitation. No man could be so false as to invite another to his house if he intended doing him any harm. I am quite easy about it, Violet."

And he meant what he said; he judged others by himself, and in his nobleness of heart had no notion what meanness was.

There was a great surprise in store for Violet. She had talked to her mother about her dress, and Mrs. Haye had said that she must have something very nice; but something "very nice" would be costly, and Francis Haye was hard to manage on such points.

Mother and daughter were discussing what was to be done under the circumstances, when a large box from London was brought by the carrier's cart to their door; it

was for Miss Haye—there was no mistake as to the address—and with some curiosity they hastened to open it.

"It is directed in a lady's hand," said Violet. "What can it be, mamma?"

"We shall see, my dear," replied Mrs. Haye.

When it was opened both ladies were speechless with surprise. It contained three complete costumes—one for a garden party, a most charming combination of blue and white, with a tasteful Parisian bonnet, gloves, shoes, and everything to match—a dress that Mrs. Haye declared made her heart beat to think of the money it must have cost; then an evening dress of white silk, with a train of blue velvet and blue velvet trimmings; lastly, a full and most exquisite costume for the ball, of white silk trimmed with silver fringe and silver leaves.

Mrs. Haye was amazed when she saw it. With it were white satin shoes, a fan, white feathers mounted in silver, a silver bouquet-holder, gloves, and a marvelous handkerchief of dainty lace. Violet looked at the treasures in wonder.

"Who can have sent these, mamma?" she asked. "I do not like to take them. Have you ever seen anything so beautiful?"

"If I believed in fairies," said Mrs. Haye, "I should think that a fairy had sent them."

In her own mind she felt quite sure that the donor was Sir Owen, but she would not say so. Violet had no suspicion—not even the faintest. She never thought of Sir Owen.

"It must be a lady who has sent them," said Violet. "No man would have understood what was wanted. Mamma, should you think that it was Lady Rolfe?"

"I am really puzzled," replied Mrs. Haye. "We will call your father."

Francis Haye came to the rescue. Violet wearied herself in trying to guess, but she could not divine who was her benefactor. When she had carried the ball-dress away, the husband and wife looked at each other.

"It is just as I said, Francis; but, mind, not one word. One careless word may spoil it all."

And neither of them breathed a sound to Violet of what they suspected.

CHAPTER XV.

"LOVE WAS BEST."

Mrs. Haye declared that it was fortunate rain fell two days before the *fete*; it cleared the air, it freshened the grass, it washed the dust from the trees and hedges, it made the whole face of nature so sweet, so fresh and fair, that it was a pleasure to breathe. The air was odorous with the scent of flowers and of green leaves.

Sir Owen appeared to time; his sumptuously appointed carriage, with the magnificent roans, drove up to the Limes. Nothing could have exceeded his kindness—he was so attentive to Francis Haye, so kind to Mrs. Haye, so deferential to Violet. Again she felt how pleasant it was. She saw deep satisfaction on her father's face, great pride on her mother's. She was young and heedless, and on such an exquisite June day how could she help feeling bright and happy? Moreover, she held something in her hand which gladdened her heart. Just as she was starting, while Sir Owen stood hat in hand waiting for her, a messenger came with a note from Felix—only a few short lines hurriedly written, but which went straight to her heart.

"MY DARLING VIOLET:—I send a few words to greet you as you are starting, and to wish you a very pleasant, happy visit. You will not forget me, sweet? You will say to yourself over and over again that you are pledged to me? I trust you implicitly. You love me, and I am content. I kiss your sweet hands, and leave my heart in them."

How he loved her! She repeated it again and again. How he loved her! The little note pleased her. She drove away, with Sir Owen whispering all kinds of compliments to her; but her lover's face was before her eyes, and his words were in her heart. They drove through the magnificent park with its herds of antlered deer, through the superb grounds, to the grand entrance, and then Violet looked up in wonder.

The afternoon sun fell upon the grand old building, showing the towers and turrets, the deep oriel windows, the Venetian balconies, bringing out the picturesque outlines of the noble edifice. There was a flight of broad marble steps, and then the great door opened into an entrance hall the first glimpse of which bewildered Violet. She hardly

knew that such treasures existed—that such splendor could be; unconsciously she crushed her lover's little note in her hand as she beheld the treasures on the walls.

She passed through long, broad corridors, where white marble statues gleamed from among pyramids of choice flowers; she gazed on glorious pictures and picturesque fountains; and all the time Sir Owen walked by her side whispering gay, pretty compliments. They came to the drawing-room at last—a large, lofty room, with an exquisitely painted ceiling, and bright with flowers and statues. In the midst of all the magnificence stood Lady Rolfe, with a smile on her face, waiting to receive them.

That was remarkable in itself; but that she should be so gracious and so amiable was more remarkable still. She welcomed them with courtly, kindly words, and in all she said she was seconded by her daughter Lavinia. Sir Owen, she said, had asked her to assist him, and she had for a time undertaken the duties of hostess.

Then she sent them to their various rooms. Before Violet had been many minutes in hers a pretty Parisian soubrette entered, who announced herself as Lady Rolfe's maid.

"Her ladyship," she continued, "thought that as you had not brought a maid, I might be of some service to you."

For half a moment Violet felt a sensation of shame that she had brought no maid, then of wonder as to what she should do with one. She accepted the proffered help, and the little Parisian, Aimee by name, soon had everything ready for her.

Violet had never worn a fashionable evening dress before, and she looked in real wonder at the marvelous whiteness of her fair neck and arms, and at her rounded shoulders, that were perfect as a masterpiece of sculpture, while the white silk showed off her graceful figure. The train of blue velvet gave her the look of a princess. In her hair Aimee placed a beautiful white camellia, and another lay, like a white star, in the bodice of her dress.

To Aimee it was a labor of love to dress Miss Haye. She did wonders with the shining, golden hair; and when Violet was ready to go down-stairs she stood before the great mirror in wonder. Was that exquisitely radiant girl herself? She longed for Felix to see her. There was no pleasure without him. How he would admire her!

What a never-to-be-forgotten evening it was! Her greatest difficulty was in keeping herself from expressing her wonder. She went down to the drawing-room, and found two or three other ladies with Lady Rolfe. She had an uneasy

consciousness that they were all talking about her as she entered, for they stopped suddenly, and looked at her curiously. But Lady Rolfe introduced her, and they were so startled by her striking beauty that they were more than civil to her. Sir Owen almost followed her into the room. How his eyes brightened as he saw her!

"For a girl like that to marry a country solicitor, to hide such beauty as hers in a place like Lilford, is simple madness," he said to himself. "She will thank me in after years for saving her from such a fate."

Then he went up to her, and scarcely left her all the evening. It was against the laws of etiquette for him to take her down to dinner; but Lady Rolfe accepted his apology with a smile. That astute lady had explained the motives of her policy to Lavinia.

"I understand Sir Owen," she said. "If any one opposes him he will lose his reason over the girl. Place no obstacle in the way of his admiration, and he will soon tire of her. He cannot marry her, for she is engaged to Felix Lonsdale."

So, with great amiability, Lady Rolfe had accepted Sir Owen's invitation to act as hostess for three or four days. She had determined that she would give him every opportunity of being with Violet, on the principle that the more he saw of her the sooner he would tire of her. Sir Owen took her down to dinner, and sat by her side. Violet was dazed with wonder. She saw the superb gold and silver plate, the magnificent epergnes, the rare flowers, the costly wines, and richly cut glass. She felt half afraid of the well-trained butler and his noiseless assistants—it was all a scene of splendor and magnificence, that dazed and bewildered her.

Sir Owen gave her little time to think, and every one took their cue from him—visitors and servants. Violet was queen of the evening. She concealed her trepidation, and carefully watching Lady Rolfe, she imitated her exactly. Then, when the ladies withdrew, she was the center of observation—her exquisite beauty, her dainty dress, the attention paid to her by Sir Owen, made her the most important person present.

Sir Owen did not long delay entering the drawing-room; and then he selected a luxurious chair, and enthroned her. He found her a footstool; he waited upon her as though she had been a princess and he a page; he never left her; and she, looking at the splendor which surrounded her—looking at the wealth, the magnificence—wondered that she

should play a part in such a scene. It was a night of triumph for her; but she did not forget Felix; all would have been perfect had he been by her side.

The guests talked of the morrow's *fete*—they had music and cards. Sir Owen gave Violet a lesson in cards; and when the evening was over she went to her mother.

"Mamma," she said, "how delightful it has all been! I am so sorry that it is over. I wish it would last forever."

Mrs. Haye smiled.

"It is more pleasant, Violet, than the struggle that falls to the lot of people with limited means."

It was pleasant. The dainty, luxury-loving nature found it wonderfully pleasant. Violet smiled to herself as she sat in her room that night. Aimee was brushing the long, shining, golden hair. She was surrounded by every luxury—hangings of silk and lace, Dresden china, Bohemian glass; the room was a marvel in its way. She smiled as she realized how dear luxury was to her already—how she admired soft velvet chairs and thick carpets—liked to eat from silver plate and drink from richly cut glass—liked to be waited on by well-trained servants—to live in this atmosphere of splendor—to wear rich silks and costly lace, precious stones and gold. It was an entrancing life, and the other would never seem quite the same again. After all, there was nothing like money.

She dismissed her maid, and would have slept, but that a ray of moonlight shone in through the window. One part of the rose silk hangings had been left undrawn. She went to arrange it to shut out the moonlight, so that she could sleep, and, when she stood near the window and saw the silver light on the trees and flowers, her thoughts went back to Felix—went back to that lovely night when she had stood with him by the lilac bushes. How he loved her! His face appeared so plainly before her—the love-lit, earnest eyes and winning lips.

After all, love was best; wealth was very pleasant, but it was sweeter to be loved than to be rich. And she fell asleep with her lover's name on her lips.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WORD IN PRIVATE.

The next morning was bright and warm. There was a hurried breakfast—every one seemed to have so much to

do; from early dawn men had been at work in the park. Sir Owen came down stairs radiant.

"Who will say one word against English weather after this?" he cried; then, when he saw Violet, he bowed low to her. "The queen of the *fete*," he whispered, and she blushed as she heard him.

The post-bag came as they sat at breakfast, and there was a note for her; she saw that it was from Felix, and put it aside until she should be alone. Looking up suddenly she saw Sir Owen watching her intently, and again a hot flush burned her face. He did not leave her—everything was referred to her; her wishes, her tastes were continually consulted.

"My dear Lavinia," said Lady Rolfe, with upraised hands, "it is something incredible—he treats her just as though she were mistress of this house. It is quite enough to turn any girl's brain."

Though he spent his whole time with her, Sir Owen did not forget her parents. Francis Haye declared that he was "in clover;" his wife had never been so happy; they were waited upon and attended to before every one else—they had every luxury, every attention.

The guests arrived early. Everything was a success, but the crowning satisfaction of all was that the weather was so fine. Violet found time to read her lover's note; it said how disappointed he was that he could not come to Garswood, but to attend the *fete* even for one hour was an impossibility for him. His father had had a very serious relapse, and he could not leave the office. She was sorry; yet she could not understand how it was she experienced a certain feeling of relief—her present triumph was so great, and she enjoyed it so thoroughly. It must all have ended when Felix came. It was like a play now; she was playing the part of mistress of a magnificent mansion—of queen of that brilliant *fete*. She must have given up this role if Felix had come. She must have spent the time with him.

"I shall never in my life have such a triumph again," she said to herself—"never again. I may as well enjoy this while it lasts."

She looked superbly beautiful in the dress that had been sent to her for the *fete*; and, as she walked through the grounds with Sir Owen by her side, she was the observed of all observers. She felt her triumph keenly—it was no small one—yet she had an uneasy sensation, too, that it was, after all, a false position. She was the promised wife

of another man—she had no right to be queen there, with Sir Owen by her side.

It was a brilliant *fete*—she had seen nothing like it in her life. The *fete* at the vicarage, which had always seemed to her the very acme of aristocratic gayety, dwindled into insignificance. The sun had seldom shone on a more brilliant scene; flags and banners waved from the tall trees; there were numerous evergreen arches, marquees, and an infinity of amusements. The music from the bands echoed through the park.

"It is very beautiful," said Violet, as she stood with Sir Owen, watching the various groups.

"If you are pleased, I am well repaid," he said. "Do you not know that I would give all I have to please you? I would do all this over and over again to win one smile from you."

Suddenly, standing there, she remembered her promise to Felix that she would tell Sir Owen she was to be his wife. How was she to do it? She could not turn round to him abruptly and say, "I am going to marry Felix Lonsdale." She was tempted to do so, but it would be too brusque. "I shall find an opportunity during the evening," she thought—"I can easily make one, but not at present. I will enjoy myself now."

Then Sir Owen conducted her through the grounds. It was a veritable triumph. Her exquisite beauty, her superb dress, her radiant face, the evident admiration of this wealthy baronet by her side, were the sole themes of conversation. People bowed to her who had never seemed to be aware that she existed before; ladies pleaded for an introduction who had passed her with haughty insolence; men crowded round her, and none seemed content until he had won one smile from the sweet lips, one glance from the lovely eyes.

They passed on, Sir Owen talking eagerly to her; but she hardly heard what he was saying, she was so engrossed in the brilliant scene. He led her past the front of the Hall, and through the superb gardens. It seemed to her that they passed acre after acre of glass-houses, then they came to a little hill. At its foot was the river-bank, and its summit was crowned with a group of silver larches. A seat had been placed under them, for from the summit of that hill there was to be seen one of the loveliest pictures in England.

"Where are we going?" asked Violet, as they left the Hall and the grounds.

"I want to show you Larch Hill," he replied.

She did not quite like being there alone with him. Felix would not like it, yet how could she resist?

"Every one who comes to Garswood sees Larch Hill," he continued. "It is really the prettiest spot about here."

"But your guests will miss you," she said.

"I am with the queen of the *fete*," he returned, with a low bow, and she saw that he did not care in the least whether he was missed or not. He led her to the summit of the hill, to the rustic seat under the larches.

"I was thinking all last night," he said, "that I would bring you here to-day. I want you to look well around you. See how the sun shines on Garswood! Look at the Hall first."

It was a magnificent panorama that was spread out before her. Not the least important feature in it was the grand old Hall, with its towers and turrets. He stood by her side.

"From here as far away as your eye can reach," he said, "is mine. North, south, east, and west—it is all mine. You see the river like a broad silver line in the distance—the boats and the barges on it are mine. You see the villages nestling among the trees, the rich, well-cared-for farms, the quiet, pretty homesteads—they are mine—all mine."

"It is a noble property," she said.

"Yes; there is not a larger or better estate in England, and the beauty of it is that it lies all together. You see the dark mass of woods over there to the left; the trees in them a magnificent fortune in themselves, and they are all mine. You see that broad stretch of meadow-land where the cattle graze—it is all mine!"

She made no reply; his words and his looks confused her.

"I am lord of the soil," he said, "for many miles round. I know no other place so fine as Garswood. Violet Haye all this is mine; and, if you will speak only one word, it shall all be yours."

She turned to him with a startled glance.

"I do not understand you," she declared. "How could it be mine?"

"It can all be yours if you will marry me, Violet," he whispered.

Her beautiful face grew pale as death.

"I cannot marry you," she replied, quickly.

"Why not, Violet? Tell me why."

"Because I am engaged to marry Felix Lonsdale."

"Is that all? What on earth does that matter? He ought to be ashamed of himself to presume to ask such a girl as you to marry him; he must be mad to think you would."

"He loves me!" she said, quietly.

"So do I—so do many others. You must not marry him, Violet; he has no money, no influence, no position; his father is under a cloud which must darken the son's future. You cannot marry him—it would be madness!"

"I am engaged to him," she replied.

"As if that mattered. Engagements like yours are broken every day; it is the commonest thing in the world—no one thinks anything of it."

She seemed to see her lover's face as he had looked into hers that night by the dew-laden lilac bushes—she almost heard his voice. She looked up at Sir Owen, her face deathly pale.

"Do you know, Sir Owen," she said, "that if I were false to Felix Lonsdale it would break his heart?"

Sir Owen laughed aloud.

"My dear Miss Haye, lawyers have no heart—what could they do with such a commodity? He might lose his temper; but men never break their hearts—a good cigar will cure the most desperate love-affair. You amuse me."

"I hope you are speaking falsely," she said. "I hope men are better than you paint them."

"They are all very much alike, my dear Violet," he returned. "It is most refreshing to hear that you think any man capable of breaking his heart."

"Ah, but you do not know Felix Lonsdale. You do not know how he loves me."

"I never wish to know Felix Lonsdale," he told her. "I have no partiality for men under a cloud. I know how much I love you, and that is more to the point."

She shrank from him with a pale, scared face. She did not like this discussion of her lover.

"Let me tell you," he continued, "how much I love you. I think you the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life. Your beauty gladdens my heart. To win it, and keep it always near me, I would give all that I have in this world. I love you well enough to lay all my wealth at your feet, to worship you all my life. I love you so well that neither your plighted word, the opinion of the world, nor any human power, shall come between us. I would break every tie, every bond, crush every love, to win you

and make you mine. I will throw everything to the winds if you will only say the word."

The pale, beautiful girl shrank from him.

"I cannot," she said—"you know that I cannot—I must marry Felix Lonsdale."

"I could kill him!" muttered Sir Owen, under his breath, with an oath. Aloud he said, "You shall never marry him."

She shrank still farther from him, and cried aloud, and then he was full of remorse—he tried his best to comfort her.

"Listen to me, Violet," he said, and once more she raised her beautiful face to his. "Forgive me—I am more accustomed to shouting at men than to pleading with ladies. Do not think I am so cruel—why should I kill him? Do not tremble so—I shall never forgive myself."

She tried to conquer the fear that had mastered her; she stilled the trembling of her hands, the wild beating of her heart. He spoke more gently to her.

"I am more than half a savage," he said. "I am ashamed of myself. How different I should be if I had a gentle, beautiful girl like you near me! I should grow civilized. Now, Violet, listen to me. You shall not give me your answer now—not yet for many days; but I do pray you to be my wife. Do not look at me and say you cannot—you can if you will. Such promises as yours are broken every day. I will not let you give me an answer until you have thought the matter well over. Look round you once more, Violet—look at this stately home, this broad domain—think of yourself as its mistress—mistress of Garswood Hall and forty thousand a year. As Lady Chevenix—how well the name sounds!—as Lady Chevenix, I say, you would be queen of the whole county, you would be one of the most popular and wealthy women in England. You will have the world at your feet. I will buy you the most magnificent diamonds—indeed, everything that women like best. You shall be surrounded by every luxury that the world can give, if you will only say 'yes.'"

"I cannot," she murmured, but her voice was weaker and fainter this time, and he noticed the change.

"I will not accept your answer yet," he returned. "But now look at the other side of the picture. You marry this man who is under a cloud, he takes you to some wretched little home, he works day and night, yet can hardly get money enough for his expenses; you spend the prime of

your life, and lose the glory of your beauty, in a helpless struggle to make both ends meet; and you die before your time, your beauty faded and gone, worn out—even in the prime of life. I say that it is a crying shame for such a marriage to take place. You see the difference, Violet?"

"Yes, I see it, Sir Owen; but—"

"Then," he interrupted, "we will not talk about it to-day; you shall think it well over—you will be of my opinion soon. Now we will go back again—and you will not forget the view from Larch Hill? The first moment I saw you, I meant to win you, Violet. I swore to myself that you should be mine. You have promised me the first dance to-night, remember."

He talked to her on indifferent matters as they descended the hill; then he said:

"Violet—you see that I cannot call you 'Miss Haye'—try to drive that scared look from your face; my guests will think I have been frightening you."

She made a great effort to bring back the smiles and brightness to her face, but she did not succeed very well; the world was all changed for her since she had gone up Larch Hill, quite changed. There she had been calm, content, with just a shadow of longing for the grandeur around, yet happy in her lover and her love. Now she had been through a scathing temptation—one that had left her heart burning and her brain whirling; there could never be calm content for her again. As her eyes wandered over the various beauties of nature and art surrounding her, she thought to herself:

"All this might be mine—I might be Lady Chevenix and give grand entertainments here—I might be mistress of all."

Sir Owen said no more to her, but he redoubled his attentions, and people began to make pretty free comments about the matter.

"Felix Lonsdale will lose his *fiancee* if he does not mind," remarked Captain Hill, "and I shall be sorry for it."

"I believe, Lavinia," said Lady Rolfe, with an air of dismay, "Sir Owen is so infatuated that he will marry the girl after all—he will, indeed."

Francis Haye and his wife looked on in seemingly calm unconcern.

Violet found herself the center of attraction to all the men; one wanted her as a partner at croquet, another wanted her for lawn-tennis, a third craved permission to row her across the lake.

"I should like that best," she said, with a smile so sudden and so beautiful that the happy recipient of it lost his presence of mind at once.

Violet wished to be alone; she wanted time to think, to still the thrilling of her nerves; but she was mistaken in imagining that she would find solitude in a boat with a solitary companion. However, no man was ever more completely deceived—Violet sat listening to him with a flush on her face and a smile on her lips. He thought that he was making a great impression on her, whereas she was congratulating herself that she was not compelled to hear or to answer his compliments.

She tried to think but she could not; the only thing she could remember was that she might be Lady Chevenix and mistress of all she saw, if she liked. What would people say? They had spoken of Sir Owen almost as though he were an inhabitant of a brighter sphere. She had heard his probable marriage discussed almost as an arrangement of State; no one under the rank of Lady Rolfe's daughter had ever been thought of for him—and now he had asked her. She had heard the future of his wife, when he should have one, discussed many times—how she would go to court, and be one of the high ones of the earth, because of her husband's great wealth; and now this honor had fallen on her. How wonderful it seemed! Of course she must not talk about it; but before she finally refused him she would like certain people to know what a brilliant offer had been made to her—people who had not always treated her as their equal.

The boat was touching the shore, and a dozen hands were stretched out to assist her. It seemed to her only a few moments since they had started, yet they had been all around the lake. She looked up with a bewildered smile at her companion as he spoke a few polite words; he seemed to know by instinct then that this girl had chosen the boat as a kind of refuge. Then Sir Owen came and claimed her—she must have some refreshment—and he remained by her side until the round red sun set and the *fete* was over. She watched it sink behind Larch Hill, and she felt that she would never see its crimson light again in the sky without remembering what had been said there.

There was an hour for rest before the dressing for the ball began.

"If you are wise," said Lavinia Rolfe, "you will try to sleep for an hour, and then have some tea—that will restore you after the fatigue of the day."

Violet followed her advice; she lay down to rest; but how could she sleep? Through her heart swept unceasingly the same refrain—"I could be Lady Chevenix, mistress of all around, if I choose; but I hold my lover's life in my hands."

Would it be a great sin, a grievous wrong, to break such a promise? Then she reproached herself for even entertaining the thought. Of course, she would keep her promise to Felix; but in the meantime there could be no harm thinking of what had happened and how wonderful it all was.

She looked exquisitely lovely when she was dressed for the ball. Admiring eyes followed her every movement. It was agreed that the beautiful girl in white and silver, with a crown of silver leaves, was certainly the belle *par excellence*. To Violet the ball always remained more of a dream than a reality. She remembered her wonder at her own loveliness, the homage paid to her, the half subdued murmur of wonder when Sir Owen opened the ball with her, and then the significant glances that said plainly, "We can all see what this means." She longed to say, "There is nothing in it—I am going to marry Felix Lonsdale. I am only queen of the *fete*, and my reign ends with it." But she could not, so she played her part gracefully; it was all to end so soon, and then it would speedily be forgotten. She might just as well enjoy herself while she was there.

She was so brilliant, so gay, so enchanting, that Sir Owen grew every moment more hopelessly in love with her. People could think what they liked about Violet, but there was no mistake as to him—not the least in the world; he was quite lost; he saw and thought of nothing but Violet. Every one agreed that the ball was worthy of the *fete*. To Violet it was a long dream of homage—the most eligible men in the room surrounded her—she was besieged by would-be partners.

Sir Owen took Violet down to supper—the grand supper served by Gunter, which was in itself a wonder; and then they danced until the sun rose in the eastern sky. Sir Owen went to Mr. Haye.

"I will do myself the pleasure of driving you home this afternoon," he said, "if you will not spend another night here. I have something to say to you before you go."

CHAPTER XVII.

STILL TRUE.

"If I had been Mephistopheles himself I could not have managed better," thought Sir Owen, as he watched the three visitors who were of such vital consequence to him. "Seeing I have had just what I wanted all my life, it is not likely I shall begin to go without it now. After all, what is a promise of marriage? What does it mean? People break them every day, and every day they are broken for them—loss of fortune, loss of health, a hundred commonplace reasons—loss of fancy—all make a promise of marriage null and void. Such a man as this Lonsdale had no right to ask a girl like Violet Haye to sacrifice herself to him. It is the privilege of a rich man to win for himself such beauty as hers. So far from doing a bad action, I am doing a good one in rescuing this beautiful girl from poverty and obscurity. What is a broken promise? She has said she will marry him—she finds that she has made a mistake, and alters her mind. If any one sees wrong in that I do not know what wrong is."

These reflections were caused by a simple remark made by Captain Hill. He had said:

"Has any one told you, Sir Owen, that Violet Haye is engaged to marry Felix Lonsdale?" And the baronet's answer had been a muttered curse.

He had believed himself in such a lofty position that he could do as he liked without comment, but he found it was not so. The girl whom he was so madly pursuing, whom he had sworn to win, come what might, was engaged to another man, and people would make their own comments about the matter. So he reasoned and argued with himself—and to himself his ideas seemed excellent—that honor was simply a dead letter—it did not exist; it was a virtue to be subordinated to convenience—a promise was mere empty words, with no meaning, and he consoled himself by trying to believe that he was doing good rather than harm. That Violet would ultimately refuse him he did not for one moment believe. No woman, he argued, could be proof against such temptations as he offered.

This was the day on which he had promised to take Violet and her parents back to the Limes. He was very un-

willing to let them go. "They will have that handsome young lawyer about the place again, and all the good I have done will be undone" he said.

But Mrs. Haye was even more worldly-wise than himself—she declined to spend another evening there. He had ordered a dainty luncheon to be prepared for them in a charming little anteroom known as the Star Room—it bore that name because it was one blaze of light, through the number of its mirrors, girandoles, and lusters. When the sun came through the eastern window, and lighted it, the effect was something magnificent. If he had hoped to dazzle them with a fresh exhibition of his wealth, he had most certainly chosen the right way.

Then luncheon was laid on the table, elaborately spread with handsome plate, rare wine, costly fruit—every luxury that could gladden the heart of man. When Sir Owen sat down with them Mr. Haye expressed his regret at leaving so magnificent and hospitable a house. His host looked up with a slight laugh—a keen observer would have seen that he was agitated.

"I am glad you like the place," he said. "I have been asking your daughter to remain here."

A warning touch from his wife told Francis Haye that he was to remain silent. She looked at and addressed Sir Owen.

"I do not understand you; how could Violet remain here without us?"

"As my wife, Mrs. Haye; if she will only consent, Garswood and its master, with all that it contains, shall be hers."

Mrs. Haye rose slowly, and drew her shawl around her shoulders.

"You are very kind, Sir Owen," she said, dryly, "and I am sure that Violet must be quite flattered by your generous offer; but—she has promised, I believe, to marry Felix Lonsdale."

"That promise should not bind her," he cried, eagerly; "it was won from her under false pretenses. It will be a crying shame if you allow her to keep it."

"So I think," said Mrs. Haye, as she drew on her gloves; "but I am quite powerless in the matter." Nor would she hear another word.

She hastened their departure, and Sir Owen left his other guests to drive them home.

In this case, as in others, Mrs. Haye showed herself to be a woman of more than ordinary intelligence. An average

woman would instantly have taken Sir Owen's part—would have done her utmost to induce her daughter to break her promise—would have railed against Felix. Mrs. Haye was far too wise—to take that course would be to confirm Violet in keeping her word. She understood women—she knew that, if she opposed her, Violet would take refuge in making herself an interesting martyr; whereas, if she and her husband remained passive, and allowed her to see just what she might have and what she might lose, Mrs. Haye had no doubt of the result.

Sir Owen remained at the Limes with them for an hour or two, and it was Mrs. Haye who reminded him that his guests were waiting.

"I do not care for my guests," he said—"I care only for you. If you will not go back with me you must let me stop here," and she had great difficulty in persuading him to go.

Not one word about Sir Owen was said to Violet after his departure.

"Leave it all to me, Francis," said Mrs. Haye to her husband; "if you interfere you will mar all. Leave it to me, and do not utter a single word."

He obeyed, well pleased to have no responsibility in the matter—he did not like the idea of a broken promise.

Violet had expected expostulation, reproaches, persuasion. She could hardly realize the silence · then she came to the conclusion that her parents must have thought Sir Owen was joking, and her dignity was somewhat wounded at the notion.

Later on in the evening Felix came, and she saw that he looked anxious, worn, and haggard. Mrs. Haye had never received him more kindly. Mr. Haye was tired, and had gone to his own room. Mrs. Haye made Felix sit down with them, and began to talk to him about his father, his family, the business, and its prospects.

The simple, noble-hearted young fellow opened his whole heart to her; he told her all his sorrow and distress about his father—how he had been out, and had met some one who had spoken to him harshly in respect of the will case, and the consequence had been a severe relapse.

"The fact is," said Felix, "that my father is breaking his honest heart, Mrs. Haye."

"It is very sad," she returned—"very sad, and very hopeless."

"Yes—it is almost hopeless," agreed Felix; "it seems as though the very spring of his life were gone. I know

what would be the only thing to cure him. It would be if all his fellow townsmen—all his old friends—met together and did something to prove that they had confidence in him; something of that kind, proving to him that he was respected and esteemed, would be the only thing to cure him."

"And that will never happen, of course," said Mrs. Haye.

"I am afraid not, but it is the only thing to save him. Dear Mrs. Haye, you are very good to listen to me—I ought not to bring my troubles here."

Mrs. Haye looked kindly at him.

"Of course," she said, "if he gets no better, the maintenance of the whole family will fall upon you, Felix."

"Yes," he replied, "it will fall upon me; I cannot desert them—I must work for my mother and the little ones."

"In that case, my poor boy," she asked, "what will you do with a wife?"

He knelt down by Violet's side, and took her hand in his; he kissed it with a passion that could not be told.

"What shall I do with a wife?" he cried. "Ask me rather what I shall do without one. My wife will be my haven, my rest, my hope, my refuge—will give me courage, and hope, and fortitude; she will give strength to my mind, my heart, my brain; my wife will be the whole world to me."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Haye, gently, "but, Felix, how are you to keep her? How is she to live? You could not take a wife home to Vale House, to an invalid father, a stepmother, and all those children."

"No; I should make a home of my own," he replied. "Ah, you do not know how I love Violet—how I should work—how I should toil day and night for her! I would keep both homes." Then he looked up into Violet's face. "You would help me, my darling, would you not? You would dispense with luxuries for a time—only for a time? You would be the nerve of my arm, the strength of my soul. You love me enough to help me over a few troublesome years, and then fortune will smile on me. You love me enough for that, sweetheart?"

"Yes, I love you," she whispered.

Mrs. Haye rose from her seat and said she must go to her husband. She left Felix kneeling at her daughter's feet; when she was gone he buried his face in the silken folds of Violet's dress; he kissed them, he kissed her hands, he called her by every endearing name.

"It has seemed to me like an eternity," he said. "Oh,

Violet, sweet, you must never go away from me for three days again. Every hour has seemed a year long. Let me look into your eyes, and see if you love me as you did when you went."

"Yes, just as much," she said.

"And the luxury, the pleasure, the admiration, has not robbed me of one beat of your heart?"

"No, not one," she replied.

"Oh, true heart—oh, dearest love, how Heaven has blessed me in giving you to me. How selfish it seems of me to have brought my troubles here to you, just as you have come from such a bright world."

"I have a right to bear your troubles," she said; but her eyes dropped half sadly before his. She said to herself, "Dear Heaven, how will it end?"

"You are all the world to me!" he cried, passionately. "I have but you, Violet. It seems to me all a blank where you are not. I work for others, and I love them; but you, my wife that is to be, are my hope and my refuge; you are the sun of my life—without you—"

She laid her hand gently on his lips.

"We will not talk of that," she said; and once more, with all the deep passion of his heart, he kissed the silken folds of her dress—the sweet hands—the tresses of golden hair.

"My love is a garment that infolds you, sweet," he said. "The ground on which you stand is sacred to me; the breeze that kisses your face is sacred, too. I would make my love a shield and a buckler for you. Oh, Violet, it is almost a terrible thing for a man to love a woman as I love you. Will you tell me now about the *fete?* Did not every one envy me? And tell me, my darling, did you keep me in your memory?"

Then came to her the memory of Larch Hill and the fiery temptation she had battled with there; but she answered him:

"Yes, I remembered you the whole time," and he clasped her in his arms.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER TEMPTATION.

"A dreary future," said Mrs. Haye, "a dreary future. I cannot tell you how sorry I am for Felix, Violet."

For Mrs. Haye was true to her tactics. She never named

Sir Owen at all—she left him quite out of the question; but she talked incessantly of Felix, and always in the most kind and pitying manner. She deplored his fate; she declared it was the saddest she had ever known. To think that a man so young and so gifted should be burdened with the maintenance of so large a family. She feared he would not have the strength to manage it.

They were arranging a wardrobe one day, and the beautiful dresses so mysteriously sent for the *fete* lay within it.

"Violet," said Mrs. Haye, solemnly, "if I were you, I would put those dresses away out of sight; you will never want them again; you will never have an opportunity of wearing them."

"Mamma, do you think I am going to live in a cloister?" she asked.

"No, my dear, certainly not; but I know where and how you are going to live. It will be in a small house on very limited means."

"I shall go out at times," said Violet.

"Yes, but you will not be invited to such places as Garswood—it is out of the question; poor Felix could neither visit nor receive such people. And now that we are speaking of it, Violet, I think it would be just as well if you would try to learn a little of domestic work. You have been foolishly brought up, I am afraid."

"Why should I learn to work, mamma?" she asked, looking at her hands, so white, so delicate. "I am sure Felix will never like to see me working."

"He will not be able to help it, poor fellow!" Mrs. Haye said, pityingly. "But you must look your future in the face, Violet; you cannot spend all your life in waiting for him—waiting until your hair grows gray, and your youth only your dream; and, if you marry him, it must be to help him."

"So I will help him, mamma," she replied.

"That is quite right," said Mrs. Haye, serenely. "I am glad to hear you say so. I should like you to understand what helping in this case means. Felix will have to keep up Vale House and maintain all his stepmother's family. He will not, of course, have much to spare for himself: hence he will want all the care and economy possible in his household. You should learn to cook, to sew, to iron, to manage a house, for you will not be able to keep more than one servant, if you manage to do that."

"Mamma!" cried Violet, in dismay, and she raised her

pretty white hands with the pink tapering fingers deprecatingly.

"I am sure of it, Violet. I know what money is, and how far it goes. With every man's hand against him Felix will have a hard struggle, and the only way in which you can help him will be by spending as little money as you can."

Then wise Mrs. Haye left the words to work their effect.

In the meantime Sir Owen devoted himself unceasingly to Violet. Every day brought some lavish gift or other to the Limes—great hampers of game and fruit, of rare foreign wines, of flowers—and Violet said nothing of them before Felix, because she saw he was hurt that he could not do the same—and during that period the girl's mind was tortured and harassed by doubts and fears.

It was such a chance to miss. She might be Lady Chevenix of Garswood; she might be the wealthiest woman in all the county; and yet she had elected to be nothing all her life but a mere domestic drudge. When Sir Owen came over and insisted upon driving her out, she would say to herself that luxury was a necessity for her, that she could not live without it, that she must have it. Then Eve Lester would spend a day with her, and would talk to her with such noble simplicity, such simple grandeur, of the life before her, that she felt she loved Felix more than ever. At Vale House, however, the cloud deepened, and honest Darcy Lonsdale wore his great heart away in sorrowful repining.

One evening—how well Violet remembered it—it was the beginning of July, and the western sky was crimson with the setting of the sun, Sir Owen rode up to the door. He came into the dining-room, where the family had just partaken of tea, and it struck all of them that he was ill at ease. He spoke chiefly to Mrs. Haye, and looked but seldom at Violet.

"I went to London yesterday," he said, "and something tempted me into a jeweler's shop. I bought some very fine diamonds, and I have brought them for you to see."

He took some heavy morocco cases from his pocket, and Violet looked up with a new light in her eyes and a low cry of delight. "Few women," thought Sir Owen, "can resist the temptation of diamonds."

He opened the cases, and laid them before her. There were a beautiful diamond star, a superb necklace, brooch, ear-rings, bracelet, and rings, all with stones of the first water, full of fire, clear, brilliant, and beautiful. The crim-

son light of the setting sun shone in them and made them so dazzlingly bright that it was almost impossible to look at them.

"What do you think of them?" he asked Violet.

"I cannot tell you. I did not know there was anything in the world so beautiful," she cried.

"How much are they worth?" asked Mrs. Haye.

"I have paid more thousands for them than I should like to tell you," Sir Owen replied, laughing; "and I would pay as many more to please the same person for whom they are intended. Miss Haye, will you try them on? I should like to see the effect."

But Violet's hands trembled as she tried to raise the glittering gems from their velvet beds.

"Let me help you," he said, and she did not object.

The next moment he was standing by her side. He placed the brilliant star in her golden hair, and she felt that he lingered far longer than he need have done over it.

"What wonderful hair you have!" he said. "How beautiful it is! The diamonds are not good enough for it."

Then he clasped the necklace around the white graceful neck; Violet fastened the brooch herself, and he clasped the bracelet on her lovely arm. She would rather that he had not done so—Felix would not have liked it, she was sure; but then the temptation to see herself so decked just for once was irresistible. She had never worn a diamond—and these were so gorgeous.

Very soon he placed her before the great gilt mirror, and the crimson sunlight fell upon her, on the sheen of her golden hair, on the brilliant gems, on the face more beautiful than any gem. Such a marvelous picture as she made in those glittering diamonds Sir Owen told himself had never been seen. Mr. Haye cried out in admiration.

"She is like the Queen of Sheba," he said.

"She is fairer than any queen," laughed Sir Owen. "You ought to wear diamonds, Miss Haye. You were born to wear them. Knowing that, and feeling sure how well they would become you, I have ventured to buy these for you; will you honor me by accepting them?"

But Violet drew back from the mirror with a pale, scared face, and a movement so sudden that the light in the diamonds was like gleams of fire scattered over her.

"You bought them for me?" she said.

"Yes, and I hope you will honor me by accepting them," he replied, with a low bow.

"I cannot," she said, quietly; "they are too valuable. I should never wear them."

"You shall wear them at Court," he told her, "and no royal duchess has finer."

"Felix Lonsdale would not be willing," she said, calmly; "I cannot take them."

An angry flush burned his face, a lurid light leaped into his eyes, but a sign from Mrs. Haye controlled him.

"My daughter is quite right, Sir Owen. She cannot take these diamonds from you while she is the promised wife of Felix Lonsdale. I will help you, Violet."

The diamonds were taken off and restored to their cases. Mrs. Haye had never acted more wisely. Violet would have resented it had they been pressed upon her; woman-like, when they were so quietly taken back, she began to long for them. There was no word spoken as Sir Owen replaced the cases in his pocket and rose to take his leave.

"I trust I have not offended you, Miss Haye," he said, "by offering you the best tribute I could think of to prove my admiration."

"Why should I be offended, Sir Owen? You were kind to think of me, but I—you see, I cannot take them."

"I will not offend again," he replied.

He shook hands with Francis Haye and his wife; he parted from Violet with a bow.

When the door had closed behind him Francis Haye looked at his daughter.

"You have refused quite twenty thousand pounds," he said.

Mrs. Haye held up her hand with a warning gesture.

"She has done quite right, Francis. It would be absurd for the wife of a poor struggling lawyer to wear twenty thousand pounds' worth of jewels—more than absurd. Who would make puddings and mend socks clad in such diamonds as those? Let Violet be consistent. She prefers linsey-woolsey to satin, poverty to riches. It is her own choice—we must not interfere."

Violet kissed her mother, but Mrs. Haye felt with keen delight that there was little rapture in the kiss; and all the rest of the evening the fair face was clouded.

Another thing happened which annoyed Violet. She was walking one day through Ordfield lane, when she met Lady Rolfe and her daughter Lavinia. With great cordiality her ladyship stopped to talk to her.

"Will you mind walking on with me, Miss Haye?" she

said. "I have often thought that I should like to chat with you."

"I shall be very pleased," answered Violet, little dreaming of the mortification in store for her.

"I wished to speak to you when we were at Garswood," said Lady Rolfe, "but I found no opportunity. I think it only my duty, Miss Haye, to utter a few words of warning to you about Sir Owen."

Violet looked up proudly.

"I do not think that there is the least need for such words, Lady Rolfe," she replied.

"I am truly glad to hear you say so. Sir Owen Chevenix is a wealthy man. I do not wish to say one unjust word against him, but I am quite correct in stating that he does not bear one of the best of reputations; he drinks, and—well, he has other faults which I must not name to you."

"I do not see how this concerns me," said Violet.

"But I do, Miss Haye. Pray listen to me. You have a pretty face, and Sir Owen is always attracted by such. Yours is not the first by any means that he has admired."

"I never supposed that it was," said the girl, proudly.

"That is right. If you understand the character of the man all is well, but, having a friendly interest in you, I was afraid that his flattery might mislead you."

"If she only knew the truth!" thought Violet. "If she could only guess that I have refused to be Lady Chevenix!"

"I am not alone in my ideas," continued Lady Rolfe. "I heard many ladies at Garswood say what a pity it was that no one warned you. This is what I want to say to you, Miss Haye—and, believe me, real kindness dictates the words. You are engaged to marry a very honorable gentleman. Even though he be unfortunate, do not lose the substance for the shadow; do not give him up under the mistaken impression that Sir Owen will marry you. The difference in your rank and position is too great. He is simply amusing himself with the prettiest face near him. Be warned in time—he will flirt with you, but he will never dream of marrying you."

"That is your ladyship's opinion," said Violet.

"And the opinion of every one else who knows Sir Owen and who knows you," added Lady Rolfe. "I assure you that many ladies have spoken to me about it, and have expressed a great hope that you would not be misled by Sir Owen's flattery and love of flirtation."

"If she knew all," thought Violet—"if she did but know!" And her beautiful face wore such a witching smile

as she bade Lady Rolfe good-morning that the keen, worldly woman felt alarmed.

"She would never look like that, Lavinia," she cried, "unless in some way or other she had the best of the matter. Surely it can never be that he has asked her to marry him."

"My dear mother, Sir Owen may marry just whom he pleases. The only fact which interests me is that he has not asked me to marry him. As for Miss Haye, I am not interested in her, and do not care to talk about her."

Miss Rolfe dismissed the matter very quickly from her mind, but Lady Rolfe pondered it deeply. Surely she must be mistaken—the best match in the county, the most eligible man for many miles around, could never be so absurd as to throw himself away on a mere nobody like Violet Haye, even though she had the face of an angel and the grace of a queen.

CHAPTER XIX.

VIOLET'S DECISION.

So the decision as to her own future was left entirely in Violet's hands. Neither father nor mother spoke one word which could influence her, and Felix was so engrossed in his business that he was but seldom able to see her. Sir Owen, on the contrary, always kept himself present in her mind. Every day brought hampers, parcels of books, everything that could be thought of, from the Hall. Every day brought a little note begging that she would accept flowers, fruit, or whatever accompanied it. He rode over very often himself; he seemed to bring an atmosphere of the fashionable world with him; he was always full of spirits, with wonderful news to tell.

Violet had been very much annoyed by Lady Rolfe's warning—it had turned the balance the wrong way.

"I understand," she said to herself—"they think I am so far beneath Sir Owen that he will never deign to marry me. How mistaken they are, and how little they know of the real truth! How I could surprise them if I wished to do so! What a triumph and a victory I could win over them all! How they would wonder to see me Lady Chevenix! If ever I do become Lady Chevenix, that woman, Lady Rolfe, shall come no more to Garswood."

That was the first time she had ever admitted to herself that there was an "if" in the matter—the first time she had

thought of the possibility that she might eventually be Lady Chevenix. The temptation was great and subtle; it was some time in forcing an entrance into her heart—but, once admitted, it would not leave her. There were many excuses for her—there was much that pleaded for her—her youth, her love of luxury, her dread of poverty, her longing for the bright side of life. The constant dropping of water wears away a stone. Such was Violet's case. The constant talk of poverty with which her mother plied her morning, noon, and night—the constant praise of Sir Owen, the blank, cool toleration of Felix—the wonder at the riches of the one, the pity for the poverty of the other, all influenced her, until at length a day came when her heart opened to the worship of Mammon, when love dwindled into insignificance by the side of wealth. The day came when, wearied of everything, she went out into the cool green depths of the summer woods and held her life, as it were, in her hands.

She tried to think of her case as though it were that of a stranger—as though she herself had no vital concern in it. On the one side she had to suppose that she would prove true to her promise, true to her word—that she would marry the man whom she really loved—Felix Lonsdale. "Let me look at that picture quite calmly at first," she said to herself. She would have to wait at least two or three years longer, and by then the brightness of her beauty would have waned—the spring of her youth would have left her. They would be years of sorry discomfort, too. Her mother and father would lose all patience; they would be years of constant unpleasantness; Felix, too, would doubtless be always in trouble—and she, like most of the young, gay, and beautiful, dreaded trouble. Taking the marriage at its best, it was a poor one. When she was first engaged to Felix Lonsdale, things were quite different. No cloud of disgrace hung over his family; he bade fair to become a rich man; he had every hope of making a beautiful home for her. Even then it was not such a marriage as she with her queenly dower of beauty and grace had a right to expect. Were she to marry him with his present prospects, what a fate would lie before her! Such limited means—such genteel poverty! She shuddered as she saw the years stretch themselves out before her. She foresaw hard work—the work she disliked most of all, domestic drudgery; hard fare; no balls, no parties, but little dress, nothing but the care of a house—a bare plain existence from which she shrunk—no visiting. How people would

laugh at her. It would be like going out of the world at once. But then—and her heart grew warm at the thought—she would have Felix—Felix, who loved her so dearly—Felix to whom the ground she trod on was sacred. She would be with him, and she would have the happy consciousness of having done what was right; she would have done her duty, and she might be happy after all.

Then came the other side of the picture—and the girl's brain whirled as she tried to understand it, tried to realize it. If she married Sir Owen, she would be mistress of magnificent Garswood—she would be mistress of all its grandeur, of the superb grounds, the gorgeous pictures, the wonders of silver and gold; they would be hers to use when she liked and how she liked. She would be Lady Chevenix, patroness of balls, queen of the county; she would be able to patronize Lady Rolfe in her turn, to punish those who had dared to think she required warning; she could have dresses such as she had not dreamed of; she would be great, wealthy, and powerful. But there would be no Felix with all this; she would have to give him up, and she would live the remainder of her life with a sense of having acted unfairly—of having betrayed such love and faith as were given to few women.

Those were the two paths that lay so clearly and so distinctly mapped out before her. In her heart she loved Felix—and she knew it; but that same heart longed for wealth and luxuries such as Felix could never give her—that same heart recoiled from the poverty, the struggles, the hard work, the economy, the daily cares that must attend her as the wife of Felix Lonsdale. She disliked all such; she remembered how, even when things looked brightest, she had stood in the house that had belonged to the Hendersons, wondering what her life would be like there, and recalled the curious sensation that had come over her of there not being enough there to fill her life. Then she laughed a little bitter laugh as she flung away the wild flowers that she was holding.

"I have a desire to be rich," she said, "but none to be noble. I am not noble. I see the right and honorable path, but I have not the strength to follow it. I hate myself for being what I am, but I cannot change."

She made no false excuses to herself; she gave no high-flown name to the sin she was about to commit. Mammon tempted her, and she fell; the spirit of the world, the pride of life, the love of riches had all entered her soul, and taken possession of it. She did not disguise from

herself what she was doing when she deliberately resolved to break her plighted word—to give up her lover and marry Sir Owen.

Her temptations had been many and great—they had been continual, they had been hard to resist; but that was no excuse. She knew that she was committing a double sin; she was proving false to the one man whom she really loved to marry one whom she did not love at all.

"It is a double sin," she said to herself, "but I cannot help it—I could not go through a life of drudgery and poverty. Felix will hate me, but in after years he will know that my decision was wise."

So she thought and mused, dreaming in the sweet shade of the summer woods of the gorgeous future that would be hers if she married Sir Owen. Presently her mood changed and her eyes filled with passionate tears as she thought of Felix.

"I love Felix!" she cried. "Why can he not have Garswood? Why must he be poor and obscure while Owen Chevenix revels in wealth? It is not fair."

She had love and wealth both before her, yet she had deliberately given up love and had chosen wealth. She made no effort to justify herself in her own eyes.

"Those diamonds were too much for me," she said. "I cannot help it if I am not noble by nature."

Yet, when she had left the woods, and walked home through the meadows, something was gone from the sunlight, something from the song of the birds, which was never to be there again for her. She walked as one over whom a shadow lies. She had joined hands with sin—and sin is never a cheerful companion. The flowers and the trees, the color of the grass, had lost their charms for her—there was a dark shade over everything.

"Will it always be like this?" she thought. "If it is, I shall not find my future very bright."

Then the girl's heart misgave her. As she looked around everything reminded her of Felix. She had walked with him down those groves, she had lingered with him by that stile and under those trees; he had been so much part of her life that she could not picture life without him.

"How shall I live without him?" she said. "How shall I spend the days, the years without him?" Then she tried to harden her heart. "People cannot live on love and poetry," she told herself; "if they could all would be well."

That same evening she said to Mrs. Haye:

"Mamma, I have been thinking it will be better for Felix

and myself to part. I am afraid he has enough on his shoulders."

"I have thought so for some time, my dear," was the quiet reply. "Your engagement is folly, your marriage would be madness."

Then Violet went up to her mother, and put one arm around her neck.

"Mamma," she said, "you will save me all trouble?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Haye, "you may safely leave it all to me."

And so wealth won a soul not noble enough to live for love.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LETTER.

A cruel day dawned for Felix Lonsdale—a day when the sun shone so brightly and with such heat that grass, flowers, and leaves withered beneath his fervent rays, when a golden haze seemed to lie over the land, and the brooks ran slowly over the pebbles beneath them—a day when the wind was still, and not the faintest whisper of a breeze stirred the leaves or blossoms—a cruel day. He remembered it all through his life, for the warm sunlight seemed suddenly to change into a fire that burned him, everything bright and fair appeared to wither before his eyes. It was a day which brought him a pain that never quite left him while life lasted.

He was in his office in the High street—the office that had once borne such signs of prosperity—where the great iron safes had been filled with deeds, and huge bill-files had been loaded with documents—where the tables had been strewn with papers and letters—where busy clerks had passed the day, all too short for the work they had to do—where people were always going and coming with the air of having important business on hand.

It was all so different now. One by one the clerks had gone—there was nothing to do. One by one the neighboring squires and farmers had withdrawn their business from the old office. There was so little to transact now that Felix could manage with one clerk. Still he had hope. He felt sure that in time this state of things must improve. When people began to think calmly they would know that his father was innocent of that which had been imputed to him.

Felix was seated in his office. It was too warm for business—no one came in. There were no messages, no interviews—he had nothing professional to do. The clerk was busy copying a deed, and Felix was making the most of his time by writing an essay upon the "Inequalities of British Law."

Suddenly the postman's knock was heard in the quiet street, where on that scorching day even the very houses seemed to sleep. The sound did not interest Felix; he expected no letter. Violet seldom sent him a little note; when she did so it was like the finest cordial to him—he worked the better for it—he was happier an! brighter. Perhaps, if she had known how happy those letters made him, she would have written oftener.

Presently, to his surprise, came the sharp sudden knock of the postman at his own door. The clerk quickly disappeared, and then returned and placed a letter in his hands—a lady's letter, with a faint odor of violets. He opened it and looked at the signature—"Martha Haye."

It was from Violet's mother. What could she have to say to him? It was an invitation probably. He put aside his essay, and began to read the note.

"My Dear Felix:—That which I have to say will pain you, I know; but I connot help it—it must be said. The engagement between you and my daughter must come to an end. The circumstances under which I gave my consent were quite different from those existing at present. Your prospects have quite altered. If you marry my daughter now, you cannot keep her in anything like the position in which she lives even at present; and I am not willing to see her become a mere domestic drudge. Mr Haye and myself wish the engagement to end at once, as under no circumstances could we consent to the marriage. Violet sends her love, and desires me to say that all this is written by her wish, and that she hopes always to be your friend. She is going away on a long visit to one of her relatives. Hoping you will see the necessity for this step, I am yours very sincerely,

"Martha Haye."

He read it through, at first with the feeling and conviction that it must be a practical joke, then with a deadly assurance that they were going to take Violet from him. The handsome, worn face grew deadly pale; a dazed, dim look came into his eyes; a great, tearless, voiceless sob rose to his lips; the sunlight seemed to change to a blood-red mist, and a sound like the roar of distant waters filled his ears. He sat with the letter open in his hand, dazed as a man who had received a terrible blow.

How long he sat he never knew; it seemed to him that years of agony, years of torture, rolled over his head. He

was literally stunned. He had borne all his sorrows with a brave, strong heart because he had a true hope, a beautiful, warm love. To take that from him was to leave him with no ground to stand on.

Slowly thought and reason came back to him. He rose, still with the open letter in his hands, with a white, set look on his handsome, haggard young face which might have touched a heart of stone. He took his hat from the stand, and the clerk looked after him with a terrified gaze, wondering what could have happened to him.

"There was bad news in the letter," he said, "but where has he gone with it open in his hand like that?"

More than one person whom Felix Lonsdale met asked themselves the same thing, more than one spoke to him; but he did not hear—he walked on, looking straight before him, his eyes fixed on vacancy, his white, set face without change or expression, until he reached the Limes. What he suffered as he passed the old land-marks, the trees, the stiles, the lilac bushes at the gate, was known only to Heaven.

He went straight into the house, and Mrs. Haye herself was the first person that he met.

She was half frightened when her eyes fell upon his face; so unlike was it to any face she had ever seen, so changed by his great woe, she could hardly recognize it. She held out her hand to him with some commonplace words of welcome. He did not hear them.

"Come in here," he said, and, taking her arm, he led her into the nearest room. "Tell me," he asked, "did you write this?"

There was nothing to be said but the truth, yet in all her life Mrs. Haye had never been more frightened. She had to deal with a desperate man.

"Yes, I wrote it, Felix; it was wisest, kindest, best."

"And you say that Violet is willing—that Violet knows about it?"

"I wrote it with her express sanction," she replied.

"It is false! I would not believe you if you swore it! I will not believe it! Heaven is not so cruel."

"There is no cruelty in it," said Mrs. Haye; "it is what must be done."

"Must be done! Do you know that she is my life itself, that I have no life apart from her, no hope that does not begin and end with her? If you take her from me, you leave a dead body—she is my soul itself!"

He paused, for the passion of his words overcame him

How was he to tell this woman what Violet, his beautiful love, was to him? How weak and impotent words were!

"I know that you are very fond of her," Mrs. Haye said, gently; "still it cannot be—it cannot, indeed."

"Will you tell me why you have done this cruel deed? What is your motive?"

"Because you cannot afford to marry; you must not burden yourself with a wife."

"Surely I know best. I can work—I do work. I would work night and day, with one hope before me of making my darling my wife. She loves me, she knows what trouble has come to us, she is willing to wait a few months longer, and then share my lot. It will be brighter in time everything will come right for us yet. I have no fear."

"I am not willing, her father is not willing—we see no use, no sense in the best and brightest years of her life being wasted in waiting for a marriage that, when it comes, will be the worst thing that could happen to her. We are not willing; and I tell you frankly that Violet sees matters as we do. She wished me to say all this."

"Do you know what you are doing to me—what you are taking from me? Do you understand," he cried hoarsely, "that you are killing me?"

"I am sorry, of course—it is very hard, I know—but such a life as you offer Violet would kill her."

"I do not believe it!" he cried. "You changed to me when my fortune changed. You were willing enough to give me my darling when you thought that I was the son of a rich man. I shall be rich again in time. I have seen the change in you; you have given me cold looks for kind ones—you have been barely civil where you had been warmly cordial. I understand it—you love Mammon. Wealth, rank, luxury, are more to you than the heart of an honest man. But my darling is not like you, and I will receive the statement you have made from no lips but hers."

"My daughter is not at home, and you will gain nothing from seeing her."

"But you cannot do as you please; she is engaged to me—she is my promised wife—no man or woman living has the power to break such a bond. She could not break it herself."

"You will find you are mistaken there," said Mrs. Haye. And then Felix saw plainly that it was useless to say more to her—there was something of animosity in her tone. He left her, still holding the open letter in his hand.

"I am sorry for him," said Mrs. Haye, when describing

the scene to her husband; "but what can be done? There is one thing that I am really thankful for—he has not the least idea about Sir Owen. I am not nervous, but I do believe that if he suspected what has happened he would kill him."

As Felix left the house to return home, Jennie, a smart housemaid, who had often opened the door for him, and who thought him a noble-looking gentleman, ran after him.

"Do forgive me, sir," she said; "but you have always been so good to me, and I know all about it. I am so sorry for you, sir, that I cannot sleep for thinking of it."

He tried to look indifferent, to smile, but he could not: his pride and self-control broke down at these pitying words.

"Tell me what you know, Jennie," he said.

"They have sent her away, sir, so that you should not see her and persuade her. They have kept it quite a secret where she is gone—no one knows—but I stole into her room and saw her trunk addressed to North Alton, and I know that Mrs. Haye has a cousin living at North Alton. She is gone there, sir, and nowhere else."

"Thank you, Jennie," he said—"you have proved yourself a friend."

Jennie would not take the sovereign he offered her, and the sympathy he read in her face cheered him.

"It will be all right when I see Miss Haye," he said. "They have over-persuaded her. She loves me—and I trust her."

CHAPTER XXI.

TEMPORIZING.

Felix sent his clerk to Vale House with a note saying that the family were not to be alarmed if he did not return that evening, as he had some important business to transact in a town some miles distant; and Darcy Lonsdale, who was too ill then to feel an interest in anything professional, feebly blessed him as he listened.

"He works hard," said Kate, as she read the note; then she sighed, thinking how different matters would have been had Felix loved Evelyn instead of Violet. The Hayes had stood aloof from them in their troubles; they had expressed but little sympathy, and Mrs. Lonsdale felt it keenly. Violet had not been to see them as Eve Lester had

been; and Kate sighed again as she thought of the difference between the two girls.

North Alton was quite forty miles from Lilford. Felix knew that the name of Mrs. Haye's cousin was Miss Western. He had often heard Violet laugh about her mother's cousin, who was an old maid. He said to himself that he would go to North Alton by the night train; then he could see Violet in the morning, and be at home again in the evening. He little dreamed that people looked at him earnestly as he went to the station. His handsome young face bore the impress of unutterable sorrow; his eyes were dim and shadowed, with great dark circles round them; his lips were pale and trembling. He had never thought of taking food—he had not even drank a glass of water to cool his parched lips. So ill, so sorrow-stricken, so unlike the handsome, gallant, noble Felix of the day before was he that Mrs. Lonsdale would hardly have known him had she seen him—he looked like the ghost of himself.

When he stood before Violet she uttered a cry of sorrow and dismay. He had left the hotel to go to her aunt's house, and met her just as, dressed for a walk, she was leaving the little front garden. One of Miss Western's manias was early walking. He waited until Violet had gone some little distance down the road, and then he followed her. She gave a little cry, and stood silent and shame-stricken before him. He saw the sorrow, but not the shame, and the sorrow misled him. The dreadful livid pallor, the stony mask, fell from his face as a snow-wreath melts in the warm light of the sun.

"My darling," he cried, "I knew it was false—I knew that you had not said it! Oh, thank Heaven, thank Heaven!" He leaned, pale and breathless, against the trunk of an elm tree. "I believed in you, my darling," he said. "I knew that you had not sanctioned it; you could not—you hold my life in your hands. And yet why did you come here? Why did you not write to me? Speak to me, Violet, for by the heaven above me, I swear that I am going mad!"

She was frightened, scared, at the wild eyes, the hoarse voice, the face so full of pain. She dared not have said to him—"I have made my choice, Felix, between love and gold. I have chosen gold." And, wretched as she was, though she had given him up, and never meant to marry him, her whole heart went out to him with greater warmth and greater love than it had ever felt before. She held out

her hands to him, but started at the touch of his; they burned her like fire.

"You are making yourself ill, Felix," she said.

"Ill!" he repeated—and his laugh was more terrible to her than any words. "How would you feel, Violet, had any one tried to tear the living, beating heart from your body? Oh, my darling, tell me it is not true—tell me so, for Heaven's sake! Say that it is false—that they persuaded you, urged you, wrote without your knowledge! Speak to me quickly, for I am going mad!"

She was only a woman—at the very best a weak one—and she loved even after the weak fashion in which some women love. She could not endure the sight of his pain. She dared not tell him the truth; she did what weak women so often do—she temporized.

"I thought it best, Felix, to—give you some years free that you might work the better. I should not like to be a burden to you."

He drew a deep breath, like one relieved from an intolerable load, from an unbearable pain.

"Is that all? Oh, my darling, my generous, noble Violet, is that all? I will not reproach you. But why have you given me this terrible fright? I have been almost dead. I am fifty years older with these hours of terrible pain. Why did you not tell me, sweet, what you dreaded? There is nothing to fear, Violet. I am so strong when I think of you that I could work by night and by day yet never feel fatigued. Such love as mine puts nerve into a man's right arm. Oh, Violet sweet, you need not fear! You shall have a home as beautiful as love can make it. You shall have a life so easy and so free from care that when it ends you will look back in wonder to see how it has passed. You shall never know pain or fatigue that I can save you from. You shall be served and waited upon and attended to unceasingly."

She made him no answer, but her hands touched his gently.

"A burden!" he repeated. "You were afraid of being a burden to me! Oh, Violet, life of my life, I ought to laugh at you! Sweet burden that I would fain carry until death claims me! Would to Heaven that the time were near when I could make the dear burden all mine!"

Still she had not the courage to look at him and say, "I love you, but I love riches better—I have chosen them instead of you." She had not the courage to say it in that hour. She was frightened even to remember it.

"You will never feel this fear again, Violet, will you?" he said, speaking more like himself than he had yet. "It is so absurd—yet perhaps it is natural to a sensitive mind like yours. I am sane now, but I have been mad. Does my face alarm you? You need only laugh at it, sweet. I have forgotten to eat and to drink since your mother's letter came. The sun was shining brightly and warmly, but it seemed to change all at once into a scorching fire-ball, and I went mad. Yet I did not lose my faith in you, Violet. I knew that you would never have spoken as your mother did, never have written as she did. I can forgive her; it is only natural that she should think so much of you. No man could seem good enough for you. I am not good enough, but I love you so dearly that my great love stands in the place of great riches or great rank."

Still she uttered no word—she dared not tell him the truth.

"You are strangely silent, Violet," he said. "Have I frightened you?"

"No," she replied; "but you have startled me—you look so ill, Felix, and so unlike your own self."

"No wonder, my darling," he returned. "But I will not startle you again—I will remember how sensitive you are."

She looked up at him with a smile—so sirens smile at the men they lure to destruction.

"Felix," she said, "you should not love me so much, dear—you know what I have always told you about idols of clay."

"I cannot help it; my mission in life is to love you."

"I cannot ask you to come in and see me," she said. "Miss Western does not like gentlemen; she never receives visitors."

"My darling, I must hasten home," he told her. "But you have not informed me why you came here, Violet."

"Mamma wished me to come. I was not quite strong—I wanted a change."

"And why did you not write to me, sweet?" he continued.

She paused one moment. Should she tell him or not? No—she could not; she loved him too much, and she was somewhat ashamed. She found an excuse; there was no need for it to be a very good one to satisfy him.

"I knew you were true to me, Violet," he said. "I knew that it was your mother who had persuaded you—who had written that cruel letter without your sanction, perhaps your knowledge."

"I knew that she was going to write it," Violet told him

—but he was not afraid even then. No man is so completely blind as a man in love.

"Then you sanctioned it to try me—you sanctioned it to see how much I loved you? Listen, Violet sweet—I shall go home and I shall work as no man ever did. I shall begin at once to get your house ready for you—I shall wait no longer—and when it is ready, if your mother does not give her consent, I shall run away with you. Do you hear, my darling; I shall do as Jock o' Hazledean did."

She laughed faintly. Even then she had not the courage to say, "The letter was all true, and I have given you up of my own accord." Even then she deceived him by her look and smile, if not by her words.

"I must not stay longer," he said. "I shall go back home a different man. It is a terrible thing to know that one's fate lies altogether in the hands of a single creature; but, when they are such true, sweet hands as yours, Violet, there is nothing to fear. I will go back now to my work, which is sweetened by my love. Darling, say once more for me the words I love so dearly—'I belong to you, Felix.'"

She had always said them before while looking up at him with an arch, sweet smile, her beautiful eyes seeking his; now the fair face drooped with a burning flush. She was nervous, weak, and guilty, but not guilty enough to repeat those false words.

"I am afraid Miss Western will find you here, Felix," she said; "if she does, she will send for mamma."

"Are you so closely guarded, my darling?" he laughed. "Ah, well, never mind. It will not be for long. I shall hasten home; I shall prepare your house, and when it is ready I will take you if all the world should try to prevent me, for you are my own. I shall go home happy because I trust in you, and believe in you. I shall never believe that you have changed to me until you tell me so yourself. Good-by, my darling, love of my heart—good-by!"

She watched him as he went down the high-road, and the impulse was strong upon her to call him back and say to him that she had given him up; that the life of love and struggle that he offered her had no charm for her; that she had weighed both, and had deliberately given the preference to wealth; that he must go home and learn to forget her.

She knew that she was in honor and in conscience bound to tell him this, but she did not. She watched him as he walked down the high-road, knowing that he went away

with a sense of hope in his heart that was hereafter to cause him only more deadly pain. The wrong that she did him in letting him leave her with the truth untold was as great as the wrong she had done him in breaking her plighted troth.

CHAPTER XXII.

"AM I NOT KIND?"

Felix was at rest for a short time. When he grew calmer and thought more carefully about Mrs. Haye's letter, he ceased to feel any great surprise. Mrs. Haye was, he knew, a worldly woman, and nothing was more natural under the circumstances than that she should cease to care for her daughter's marriage with him. But, with the hope that had sprung up afresh in his heart, it seemed to him that his strength and his energy had no bounds, that he could work as no one had ever worked. Violet was the mainspring of it all. If he lost her, he knew that he should never care to do another hour's labor. He began afresh with such zeal, such energy, such industry and perseverance, that every one wondered at him. He let them wonder, he knew why he was working.

And, while he was counting the hours, trying to turn each one into gold, Sir Owen was busy, too. He had come to a perfect understanding with Mr. and Mrs. Haye. He told them that he would cheerfully give half his fortune to make Violet his wife. He had asked them to help him, and had promised them their reward. Mrs. Haye went on a short visit to her cousin, and was dismayed to hear from Violet that Felix had been to see her, that he had gone back home with the hope that all was right.

"Why did you not tell him the truth, Violet?" asked Mrs. Haye, sternly. "It was cruel to deceive him further."

"I could not, mamma," she replied, her eyes filling with tears; "he looked so ill and unhappy, I could not."

"It was cruel kindness, Violet," declared Mrs. Haye, but she said no more, knowing that in her daughter's place, she should have done the same thing.

It was arranged that Sir Owen should go down to North Alton and renew his offer of marriage. If Violet consented, the marriage must take place, Mrs. Haye said, in London.

If they were married at Lilford, Felix Lonsdale was quite capable of going into the church, and taking the bride from the altar. She was sorry for him, and she felt that

it would be needless cruelty for the marriage to be celebrated just before his eyes. "It will be hard enough," she said to herself, "without that."

So all was arranged as she desired. Sir Owen went to North Alton, and the beautiful, fickle girl who had loved Felix Lonsdale and given him up, plighted her troth to a man she did not love, plighted it because he was rich. He had taken with him a magnificent diamond ring, which was to be the pledge of their engagement; and, as he placed it on her finger, he looked wistfully into her face.

"You care for me a little, Violet, do you not? You are a cold bride, after all, for a man to win. If I thought you really liked that lawyer better than me, I would not ask you to marry me, upon my soul I would not. I give you all I have—my love and my fortune. Surely you have a smile and a kind word to give me in return!"

No wonder that he spoke in that strain to her. She was too weak ever to be a great sinner, too weak to sin and forget her sin. It looked her in the face now as she stood with the light of the baronet's eyes upon her, the diamond ring on her finger, contrasting the wooing of her two lovers, and knowing full well which was best.

"Am I not kind?" she asked, with an exquisite smile; a smile that pleased him so that he clasped her in his arms and kissed her.

When he did so she wished herself dead. She said to herself that she could not go through with this new engagement; that she must let the wealth, the rank, the title pass; that she must give all up and go back to Felix. She loved Felix, and she did not, nor would she ever love Sir Owen.

She had a few minutes for these reflections, and then he was telling her of the future, of all she would enjoy, how people would envy her, and what a position she would take in the great, bright world. She listened, for the words were pleasant, and forgot her pain.

To Felix Lonsdale there came strange rumors, but he would not believe any of them. He had implicit faith in Violet, implicit trust. Until she told him that she was false to him, he should not believe one word to that effect.

One morning he received two letters. One was from Violet, and said:

"Try to forget me, Felix. I have never been worthy of the great love you have given me; I am not worthy of it now. Try to forget me; for I have been thinking it all over, and I can see that our en-

gagement must be broken. You said you would believe it when I wrote it. Believe it now, for I say that it must end. In the years to come we may be friends—never anything more. VIOLET."

He read it with unbelief. Some one had compelled her to write it; it had not been done of her own free will; of that he was sure.

The second note was from his humble, faithful friend, Jennie, the pretty housemaid, written with many apologies for the liberty she had taken; but she wanted him to know that her young lady would be at home at the Limes that night, on her road from North Alton to London. Her master and mistress were going to London with Miss Violet, she added, and she was afraid there was mischief on foot. It was her own private opinion that they had persuaded Miss Violet to marry some one else. If he went to the Limes late that evening, she would keep the entrance gate and the garden gate open, and she would manage that he should see Miss Haye.

He read both letters through, but he did not lose his reason this time. A calm, settled despair came to him, against which he struggled blindly; he would not believe that his love was false even though he read it in her own handwriting. He would not believe it unless she told him so herself; anything was more credible than that she should have deceived him and broken her word. When he believed that, he said to himself, the heavens would fall. Whom could she be going to marry? How absurd! How ridiculous! He had never heard her name mentioned except with his own. He knew that she had many admirers, but who would dare to speak of marriage to her when it was well known that she was engaged to him? He could well understand that it was Jennie's own sensitive care and anxiety for him that had led her to make the mistake.

He would go, however, and see Violet, and hear from her what it all meant; but not at night; certainly not when it was late, as though he were afraid of being seen. He was her betrothed lover, she was his promised wife. He would go up to the front door in the broad daylight, and ask to see the girl who had promised to marry him. Suddenly he remembered that, if he did so, he must betray Jennie. Violet's return had been kept a secret, and the family would at once suspect her of having betrayed it. Another thing had occurred to him; if they did not wish him to see Violet, and he went in a straightforward, honest way to ask for her, they might, and most probably would.

refuse to let him see her; they would invent some untruth or other, and, if she were really going to London, he should miss the only chance he had of seeing her. It was humiliating and mortifying, but he must act as Jennie proposed; he had no other resource. He would go that night and see Violet.

Again he wrote home to say that he should not return until late; and Kate's kind eyes filled with tears as she read, thinking how hard he was working, and her heart misgave her that it was all for nothing; that the prize he was laboring and waiting and hoping for would never be his. She had heard of Violet's absence from home, and her quick mother-wit had soon told her that of that absence Felix knew little or nothing. She drew a bad augury from that. It boded mischief to him, she felt sure. She was compelled to content herself with the thought that she would sit up for him and attend to his comfort when he did return.

Felix went. He hated himself for going at night, when no one could see him; for seeking a clandestine interview with his promised wife. The night was dark, and the wind blew cold. It was after nine when he reached the entrance gate. He found it open, and Jennie waiting for him inside.

"You will not be angry with me, sir, will you?" she said. "But it seemed to be almost as though some one were being killed. I am quite sure they have persuaded my young lady to marry some one else. I heard her crying bitterly this evening."

But Felix could not discuss the subject nearest to his heart even with this faithful, humble friend.

"Do you think I shall be able to see Miss Haye, Jennie?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I will give her a message that in a few minutes will bring her down here to you. She will not be angry with me." And in a few minutes she had kept her word.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"THE SUBSTANCE FOR THE SHADOW."

Jennie delivered her message, and Violet quickly appeared at the gate of the Limes.

Before Felix had spoken to her, before he had touched her hand, the moment he had looked into her fair, drooping face he knew that she was guilty. Something had gone

from it that he was never to see again; something was there which was never more to leave it. She gazed at him, and gave a little low cry, then standing before him she buried her face in her hands. He went up to her slowly; he took her hands from her face and raised it to his own. Then the lovely eyes closed; they could not meet his. He dropped her hands.

"You are guilty, Violet. Great Heaven, you have betrayed me. You meant what you wrote to-day."

There was something so quiet in his despair that Violet imagined his tone to be one almost of indifference, and the thought gave her courage; if he had shown any sign of great pain she would have been frightened.

"I could not help it," she replied. "Do not be angry with me, Felix. I know it is the poorest of excuses, but it is true; I cannot help it. It was of no use going on in the same dreary way. It must have come to an end sometime."

"Let me quite understand," he said; "let me make no mistake this time. What have you done, Violet?"

"I have not done anything; but it seems better that we should part. No good can come of our engagement; it was a mistake."

He looked sadly at her.

"You say so, my darling, to whom I have given the best love of my heart; my life itself; you say that?"

"It is true, Felix," she replied; "and I am very sorry. I shall never like any one as I have liked you, and you will never really care about any other woman as you have cared for me; I know it, but it cannot be helped."

He held up his head with such dignity, such passion of despair, that she was silenced. The false, light words, the false, light excuses, all withered into nothing, and she knew that she stood in the presence of a mighty sorrow, a mighty passion. All her little affectations, her miserable apologies, became as nothing before Felix's heart-rending distress and hopelessness.

"Hush!" he said. "Do not add to your sin by another false word; do not mock me by excuses which you would be ashamed to make to a servant whom you were dismissing unjustly. Tell me, is it true?"

"Is what true, Felix? Do not look so angrily at me—you frighten me. Is what true?"

As she spoke she shrank back from him until she stood near the lilac bushes, the branches of which were bare now of flowers.

"Not there," he cried, "for Heaven's sake, not there

You stood there, a few short weeks since, with your arm around my neck, with your hand in mine, swearing to be true to me, saying that you belonged to me; that you loved me. Come away from there if you would not drive me mad."

She returned to him, and they walked some little distance from the lilac bushes.

"Violet," he said, "I can hardly believe that our meeting thus is real. I must be in a dream, from which I shall soon awake, and laugh to think that I believed in what was happening. It cannot be that I, Felix Lonsdale, have had to steal under the cover of darkness to meet you, my promised wife, and that you who have loved me, who have kissed me, who have looked on me as your future husband, are here to tell me that you are false to me. Stand still, so, and let me look into the face wherein I thought all happiness lay. Now tell me, is it—true?"

He held her before him; she felt that his eyes were fixed on her; they seemed to burn to her very heart.

"You put things so strangely," she said. "I hardly know what answer to make to you. You are not fair to me. I have found that my engagement to marry you is not wise for either of us, and I tell you so. I see no heinous crime in that."

"You promised to love me, and me alone, until death; do you mean to keep that promise? No prevarication; speak truthfully, 'Yes' or 'No;' do you mean to keep that promise? Speak, Violet."

But he had to bend low to hear her answer; it was whispered "No."

"You promised to marry me, to be my wife, to spend your life with me and brighten mine; do you mean to keep that promise? Speak—'Yes' or 'No.'"

"No," she whispered again.

"Will you tell me why you refuse, Violet?"

Again she took courage at the seeming indifference of his tone.

"I cannot, Felix," she said; "you will find many another more suited to be your wife than I am."

"I do not want any one but you who have promised. What is there in the life I offer you that you dislike?"

"All of it, except—that I should like to be with you. I dislike the poverty, the obscurity, the lack of rank and position. I am not so noble as you have always thought me, Felix. I love wealth and luxury, I love magnificence. I should never be content in the little home that you would

give me; there would not be enough to fill my life. I felt that when I stood in it. I asked myself how I should live through the long years there. I should be miserable, and you would be miserable, too."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Would not love content you?" he asked.

The golden head drooped before him. She was ashamed of the words she had to speak.

"No, it would not content me," she replied. "You deem me better, wiser, and nobler than I am. There are hundreds of good and noble women in the world who ask only for love and are content with it. Seek one of those, Felix —they are worthier than I."

"Hush!" he cried again. "Do not say such words; many a man has taken the life of the woman he loved for less than that."

She shrank back from him with a pale, scared face; he smiled one of the saddest and bitterest smiles she had ever seen on a human face.

"Have no fear, Violet; I spoke without reflection. You cannot think I meant to threaten you; you, every hair of whose head is dearer to me than my own life. Love would not content you, Violet?"

"No. I may as well tell you the truth. I was ignorant of many things when I promised to marry you. I did not know what riches meant, what luxury or magnificence was, what luxury or pleasure comprised."

"And you know now?" he said when she paused.

"Yes, I know now, and I cannot do without them. I would rather have had love with them; as I cannot have both, I choose them. You cannot call it a great sin, Felix, to change my mind when I did not know what my mind was."

"Violet," he said, gravely, "do you know what even the world says of a woman who deliberately jilts her lover?"

"No," she replied.

"It says some hard things. It says that the woman who could be false to her plighted lover, would be false to her husband and to Heaven; it says that such a woman brands herself 'liar' before the whole world, that she loses the claim to rank with women of honor. That is what the world says. Do you know what a higher power than the world says?"

"No," she answered him again.

"That lying lips are an abomination. Whose lips lie so cruelly, so falsely, as the lips of the woman who breaks

her plighted word and oath of fidelity, who lures a man on to love her with sweet words and sweet smiles, who promises to love him forever, and then turns round and says she loves wealth better? Where will you get this coveted wealth, Violet, even if you persist in refusing to keep your word to me?"

But she did not answer him; there were limits to what she dare do, and she dared not tell him that she was going to marry Sir Owen.

"You are very hard on me, Felix," she said.

"Nay, I am but telling you the truth, the solemn, unvarnished truth. If you do give me up and marry even a title, never dream that you will have the respect or the esteem of your fellow-creatures; you would always be spoken of as the woman who jilted her true lover to marry a wealthier man."

But, in the pride of her youth and her beauty, in the pride of the future that seemed so brilliant to her, she would not believe that; she did not believe it, although she did not say so to him.

"Listen again, Violet," he continued, in the same grave, dispassionate voice. "You seem to think it a mere matter of changing your mind. Look at it now from my point of view; forget yourself for one minute and think of me. I have loved you all my life; ah, my darling, you will never know how dearly or how well! You are my life itself; my heart and love and soul are centered in you, my hopes have grown round you. I have always thought of you as my wife; as the chosen companion of my life. Ah, my darling, if I stood here until the sun shone again I could not tell you how I love you. I have never thought of life without you,never. I could as soon live without air, without food, as without my hope of you, my love of you; my life will end when you leave me. Think of my claim, Violet. You promised me, and I have lived on your promise; what is to become of me if you change your mind?"

"You will forget me soon, Felix," she said, gently.

"Yes, dear, when the sun ceases to shine, when the tide neither ebbs nor flows, when flowers cease to bloom and birds to sing; but not until then, Violet, not until then, my sweet." His voice took all its old sweetness, his face its old light, as he drew nearer to her. "My darling," he said, "it was not your real self that was speaking. Your parents have persuaded you. They have told you that I cannot give you a home suited for you; but I can, my darling, I can. Only trust me. It is a strange dream this; a

dream that will soon pass. They have persuaded you to say what you did. It was not my Violet who spoke, from whose heart those worldly thoughts and worldly sayings came. They have persuaded you, and talked to you, until your thoughts and ideas are all confused. Violet, sweet, forget all they have advised, forget this wretched interview. You cannot mean what you have said. Nothing so beautiful could be so false; nothing so fair could be so cruel. Let us forget it, my darling. I forgive it all, for I know it has been taught to you. Violet, let us bury the past wretched weeks. Let us begin again; you with renewed faith in me, I with my old love and old faith in you —faith and love which have never varied, and never will. Will you listen to me, Violet?"

"I cannot," she cried, and he felt the shudder that passed over her frame. "I cannot, Felix."

"Have you ceased to love me, Violet?" he asked, quietly.

"No!" she cried. "Oh, do forgive me, Felix! I wish I had!"

"You still care for me?" he asked.

It seemed some relief to her to cry out that she did care for him; to lay her golden head on his breast, and moan out that she wished she were dead. His whole face brightened and changed as he heard the words.

"You still care for me, my darling," he said, gently; "why, then, Violet, matters must come right in the end. This dark hour will pass, and happiness will dawn upon us."

So she lay sobbing near the noble heart she was breaking, while the wind wailed round them with a strange, mournful sound.

Violet was the first to speak. She raised her lovely face all wet with tears.

"You do not understand, Felix," she said, quietly. "I do love you; that makes my cowardice all the greater. I love you, but I can never marry you, because you cannot give me that which my soul loves best."

"But what if I do give it to you, Violet; what then?" he asked.

"You cannot; you must work all your life even for the moderate means that you will have. Do not talk any more about it. Felix, my resolution is fixed as are the stars in heaven; nothing can alter it, nothing can change it. We have made a mistake."

And for the first time during that interview it dawned across him that it was no girlish caprice he had to contend

with, no idle whim, but the settled resolve of a woman in whose heart love took a secondary place.

Looking at her exquisite face he asked himself what if all this time he had been mistaken, if he had given this beautiful woman credit for a noble soul and a tender heart, while she had neither? Such things had been; men had made even greater mistakes than that. What if she were worldly and selfish, false and pleasure-loving, even to the core of her heart? Could any one so fair be so false? Could an ignoble soul live in a beautiful body? He looked at her; her most fair and lovely face was all stained with tears. Was such a contradiction possible as that she should willfully give him up, yet weep because she had lost him, that she should separate herself from him, refuse to marry him, yet weep because he was lost to her? He did not turn, as some men would have done, and ask himself, "Who shall understand a woman?" He tried patiently to understand her.

"Violet, you puzzle me," he said. "Let me understand; you love me, you say?"

She sobbed out that she could not help it.

"You love me, yet you willfully break your promise to marry me. You send me away of your own free will, not because you do not love me, but because I have not money enough. Is that it, Violet?"

She did not deny it; it was the exact truth. He continued:

"You love me, and I am what you call poor. You send me away, and a richer man comes. You will marry him because he is rich; you will marry him for his money while you love me. Violet Haye, do you know what the law of God calls such a sin? Do you think your weak subterfuge of calling this crime of yours 'changing your mind' will hold good when you are judged for your actions, and the just award is given to you? What is murder, Violet Haye? If that white hand of yours had thrust a sword into my heart, you would have slain me no less cruelly than you have killed me now."

He put her from him with a bitter cry—a cry that haunted her for long years.

"You have slain the best part of me; you have slain my love, my hope; and before the great Judge I shall accuse you of my murder, Violet Haye. I shall ask for the hope, the love, the life you have taken. I shall point to you, and I shall cry out that you slew me because you loved the

gold I could not give you. Before Heaven, you have slain me!"

His despair frightened her; she drew nearer to him, and tried to soothe him, but he would not let her hands touch him.

"You are not worth a man's thought, you are not worth a man's love," he cried, "you who have slain the truest of love. Do not touch me. It is such women as you who lure men on to death, who take a man's heart and crush it like a rose-leaf. No, do not touch me, Violet;" for she clung to him, weeping and crying out that he was too hard upon her, too hard.

"No, I am not hard," he said. "To my mind there is but one kind of love, and the soul of it is truth. I do not understand such love as yours. Oh, Violet, once more let me appeal to you and warn you. Dear, you are all wrong, all wrong, and you will find it out too late. Believe me, Heaven has so made woman that to her the chief good is love; to her love is religion and life. Are you of a different nature that you can dispense with love?"

"It would not make me happy," she answered, in a low voice.

So you think, dear, in the pride of youth and beauty; but, believe me, though you may win the wealth you prize so highly, the time will come when you will be ready to surrender it all for love, and you shall not find it. Remember my words; you will long for the love you now throw away; you will live to curse your own folly in giving up the substance for the shadow."

Her tears fell while she listened silently to words that haunted her forever. His voice softened as he went on.

"You will not be young and beautiful always, Violet. The time must come when your hair will have lost its golden sheen and your eyes their light. What will wealth do for you then? If sickness comes to you, will all the wealth of the whole world purchase for you the tender touch of a loving hand or the tender words of a loving voice? You will live, my darling, through long hours of pain thinking of me, longing for me, wondering how you could have been so mad as to send me from you, crying out my name, until you remember that to love me is a crime, and that in my place you have the wealth you have chosen. Think of the long days when you will miss me. Ah, Violet, mind, lest in breaking my heart you break your own. I warn you that you cannot live without love; heed my warning before it is too late."

She made him no answer. He continued:

"I can see farther into the future than you, Violet, and with clearer eyes. I prophesy to you that the time will come when you will repent of what you are doing now, and be willing to give your whole soul to undo it. Will you heed my warning?"

Her heart went out to him in love and pity; but there was the picture before her of Garswood—the thought of the diamonds—of herself as Lady Chevenix.

"I cannot," she said.

He stood quite still for a few moments.

"You forsake me, then, for a richer lover—you give up my love for gold? Say, in plain words, that you do so; do not let there be a chance of mistake, Violet—do not let any false halo linger round your memory in the years to come. You give me up because I have not money enough?"

"Yes," she replied, but the word came slowly and with great reluctance.

"I shall not regret you, Violet—you are not worth regret," he said, but she cried out:

"Do not be so hard, Felix; I—I am weaker than a woman."

"You are, indeed," he said, gravely. "Some women's weakness is half divine; yours is—well, I will give it no name; I know none that describes anything one half so false."

"You are very hard, Felix."

He laughed aloud, and pleasure-loving Violet Haye wished never to hear such another laugh.

"I have no place here now, Violet. I will say farewell. My dear love, my lost love, farewell. Lay your sweet, cruel hands in mine once again—let me look into your sweet, false face once more. Farewell, little white hands—you will caress me and stab me no more. Farewell, sweet eyes—you will look no more into mine. Farewell, golden head—you will never lie on my breast again—never again. Farewell! 'Beauty such as woman never wore,' heart most false, love most cruel—farewell!"

His voice died away in a low wail, and the next moment he was gone, and she stood there, weeping for that which she could never recall.

"How cruel fate is!" she said. "I love Felix. Why could Felix not have Sir Owen's fortune? I almost wish that I had never seen Sir Owen. I did not think that I should care about Felix so much."

It was something new to the spoiled, petted beauty to

feel pain—to weep without being comforted. She was unjust enough to think that Felix should have staid to comfort her—should not have left her so wretched.

Then she realized that her faithful lover, so tender, so true, and so brave, had passed out of her life, and would be nothing to her for all time. She was impatient with her own misery—her own sorrow.

"If the time could come over again," she said, "I would not do it; I would marry Felix, let him be poor as he might."

But it was done; it was all over. She thought to herself that with such a lover she had managed well, for what he had said was true—many a man had taken a woman's life for less provocation. Now she was free from all ties—free to marry Sir Owen—to enjoy wealth, rank, fashion, diamonds, and everything else—free to become what Sir Owen promised her—the queen of the county, the queen of fashion—free to trample on Lady Rolfe and those who had sneered at her—free to go her own way. As for what Felix had said about her being branded, what nonsense it was! Girls did the same thing every day, and were thought none the worse for so doing. True, she remembered Mrs. Bardon, who had been engaged for three or four years to a young officer in the army, and who had jilted him (it was such an ugly word that)—jilted him to marry a wealthy landowner. Her husband afterward turned out to be one of the most miserly and disagreeable men living. Then, when she complained, people said it served her right; she should not have broken a good man's heart.

"But my story," thought Violet Haye, "is quite different from that. I look more like one born to be Lady Chevenix than born to be the wife of a poor, struggling lawyer."

She was not very angry with pretty Jennie, but she warned her that her interview with Mr. Lonsdale must be kept a secret. She believed that Felix had bribed the girl—not that the girl had told Felix.

It was just as well, she thought, that the interview had taken place; there must have been a scene some time or other. Now the matter was all settled, and she could go to London with a mind free from all anxiety. The grandeur awaiting her there must surely comfort her, for her heart ached for Felix—his burning, stinging words haunted her.

Who should dare say that on that white brow of hers was branded "liar?" Felix would be dreadfully distressed when he heard of her marriage. She knew that he would feel it most keenly; but then after a time he would forget it—no

one would bear animosity against the young and charming Lady Chevenix. When she came back again she and Felix would be friends. She would make overtures of friendship to him, and he would not decline them; he had always been so fond of her—poor Felix!

So she went away the next day to London, trying to forget the past and to think of the future. She did not care to remember that morning found her pillow wet with tears, for she had been dreaming of Felix.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WORLD A BATTLE-FIELD.

Felix Lonsdale had tried his best; he had done hard battle with his sorrow—the sorrow that had come to him while the summer moon was shining and the corn stood ripe in the fields. He had done hard, fierce, terrible battle with it. It stood there ever by his side; no one had detected it yet—its presence was a secret from every one except himself. It stood by the table, and made the sight of all food loathsome to him; it stood by his books and papers, and its dark shadows made them all illegible to him—he read no words save these—that Violet was false to him; it stood by his pillow and would not let him sleep; it came between him and the brightness of earth—between him and the mercy of Heaven. He was stunned, dazed, and bewildered by it; still he did brave battle with it. He looked at the invalid father, at the kindly mother, at the "army" of little ones; there was work to do, and he must do it. The home must be kept up, business attended to; money must be made, the home must not be neglected. Indulgence in sorrow was not a luxury for him.

He hardened his heart; he said that there was neither mercy nor kindness nor love in the world. He could not see the kindly look in Katie's tender eyes; he would not kiss the children's faces; when the Sabbath bells chimed he went miles away. Fate had been cruel to him, he would harden himself; he would be proud and stern, cold and unbending—he would give back what he had received. So hour by hour and day by day he hardened his heart, hardened his nature, and only Heaven knew what he suffered.

Within a week after his farewell to Violet the handsome face had grown so haggard that it was hardly recognizable; the kindly eyes had a wild, weird expression, as though he

were always suffering mortal pain—the ring had gone from his voice, from his laugh; he was an altered man. How he worked! He said to himself that work was the only thing which could keep him from going mad.

But it told upon him—no food, no sleep, no rest would he take—this constant warfare that kept every nerve strained. It seemed to him that if he once gave way, even if only for a moment—if he opened his heart to the dreadful sorrow waiting to be admitted—if he closed his eyes in rest—he must die. Colder and harder and prouder he grew, shutting himself and his sorrow in icy reserve; and at last Kate grew so miserable about him that she sent for Evelyn.

"I must talk to you, Eve," she said, "or my heart will break. I do not like to distress my husband—he is ill enough; and, if Felix goes on like this much longer, he will have a terrible illness, or he will die. What is the matter with him, Eve? He does not eat or sleep; he looks like a man who has been stunned; he grows so hard and cold that I am almost afraid of him. He does not open his heart to me, he avoids me, he does not even look at me—he who used to love me so well. What is the matter with him, Eve?"

Eve looked very pale and sad, her sweet face was clouded; but Kate, in her distress, did not notice it.

"I can tell you what is the matter," she replied. "I heard it this afternoon. Violet Haye has gone to London to be married."

Kate cried out that it was impossible—that it could not be—Violet Haye was betrothed to Felix.

"It is so," said Eve—"Aunt Jane told me about it this afternoon; and, fearing you would be in great trouble, I came to you at once. Violet broke off her engagement with Felix some short time since, and she is gone to London to be married."

"Married to whom?" cried Kate, in hot anger for her boy's sake.

"I do not know—she has so many admirers, but I believe it is some very rich man. Mrs. Haye is almost wild with excitement about it. She told my aunt the day before they started." And then, remembering how Felix loved Violet, they both wept together.

"I understand it all now," said Kate. "My poor boy has hidden it from us lest we should know what he suffered. Evelyn, does Heaven punish treachery?"

"I am afraid so," she replied, gently. "You say that

Felix has grown hard and cold. Tell me where he is, that I may go and see him."

"He is at the office," replied Mrs. Lonsdale. "Do go to him, Eve. He was always fond of you—he always trusted you. Go and try if you can comfort him."

A slight shadow of pain came over the sweet face—it passed in a minute.

"Yes," she said, thoughtfully, "he always trusted me. I will go and see what I can do for him."

Eve walked gently through the warm, sunlit streets. Many looked after her as she went on her mission of mercy—after the tall, graceful figure in the simple muslin dress, the plain, pretty hat with the broad brim. On her fair, sweet face, as she walked along, thinking what she should say to him, a beautiful light shone.

She went into the office without any announcement—she had done so since she was a child. Only Felix sat there, his pale, haggard face bent over his papers, a shadow like death in his eyes. He looked up in wonder at his visitor. Eve, with her sweet face, and the strange light upon it, looked like an angel come to minister to him.

"Evelyn," he said, "you are an unexpected visitor."

She went round to him, and stood by the side of his chair.

"Felix," she said, "I know what has happened, and I am come to comfort you."

"Comfort! 'Comfort scorned of devils,' the poet sings. Eve," he laughed, "what comfort can you give me?"

She took the papers from his hands, and was startled on that warm day to find his fingers as cold as death. She held them in her own—her sweet eyes filled with tears.

"Felix, you must not harden your heart against me, dear. You must not keep me outside it. We have been such true friends—such dear friends always. Do not be hard and cold and proud with me, dear friend."

"I will not, Eve," he returned, gently. "Heaven bless you, Eve!"

"Listen to me a little while, Felix," she said, and her voice stole like a strain of sweetest music over his tired senses. "No man can know a greater sorrow than this sorrow of yours. The one you loved and trusted has deceived you. Violet has been false to you."

He shrank back with a cry at the sound of the words. She only clasped his hands the more tightly.

"Never mind the pain, Felix," she said. "It is right that you should accustom yourself to hear the words, and

not shrink from them. Violet has proved false to you. I know how you love her, and I know that the words cut like a sharp knife."

"It is true, Eve," he told her, in a low voice—"it is quite true. She has forsaken me."

"It is a terrible sorrow," she said—"no greater sorrow could have befallen you; but, Felix, do not let it harden you. People treat the visitation of sorrow so unwisely. Some, when sorrow falls to their lot, harden their hearts, shut all tenderness, all love, all affection away from them. They change their whole natures. To such persons God's dealing comes as a curse, not a blessing."

"Such sorrow as mine must be a curse," he returned, sadly.

"By no means. You know the old saying, 'Sorrows are but blessings in disguise.' Who can say in after years what guise their sorrow may wear?"

"But I loved her so dearly, Eve; and I have lost her," she said.

"I know that you loved her; but, Felix, has there never been a mistaken love? Have you never heard of a man idealizing a woman, and worshiping in her virtues that she never possessed? The very fact that Violet could prove false to you proves also that she was unworthy of your love, that you thought her possessed of qualities quite foreign to her, and that she is not worth all this passion of regret."

"I loved her," was all he answered.

"I know, dear friend—I know"—and Evelyn's voice was sweet as the cooing of a dove—"and it is a terrible grief to you. Felix, because we are such dear and true friends, I am come to talk to you about this sorrow. There are three ways in which men must sorrow. The weaker part of them fly at once to drink, to dissipation, to a reckless kind of despair; they have no nobility. You are above that. Others harden themselves; they shut out all love and sympathy from their hearts; they grow cold and proud, so that no kindly influence reaches them. Others—and, dear friend, believe me, these are the noble ones—accept sorrow as a part of the discipline of life, as a gift sent from Heaven; and, while they accept it with humility, they bear it with dignity. It makes them nobler, grander, and better. It is an education that prepares them for heaven. Which of the three classes will you join, Felix?"

"The last, if I can, Eve," he said, slowly. He looked at the light on her fair face.

"Believe me," she went on, earnestly, "we shall not know, until we come to die, what great sorrows do for us, and then we shall thank Heaven for them. There is something weak and cowardly in the idea of being beaten by any trouble. This world is a battle-field, and we must fight nobly; the temptation to yield weakly to a great grief is one of the hardest that comes to us. It would be so much easier for you, Felix, to lie down and die than to do battle day by day, and so have to live your sorrow down."

"Yes, it would, Eve," he replied.

"A soul that has never suffered is but a puny soul," she said; "the strong and noble soul is the one that passes through the furnace of fire and comes out pure gold—not base metal or gold with an alloy—but pure, refined, true gold. The mystery is why men and women must all suffer; but that we shall never fathom; we only know that 'God sends pain—even to his best beloved He sends pain.'"

Something in the brave face and the brave, patient voice touched him. He looked up at her suddenly.

"Surely, Eve," he said, "you have had no sorrow that you should speak in such a fashion?"

She smiled, and he thought how like her face was to that of pictured angels.

"Yes," she said, "I have a great sorrow; but it is dumb—it will never find a voice—it will die with me, and be buried in my grave."

"What has your sorrow done for you, Eve?" he asked, after a time.

Again came the beautiful light on the sweet face.

"It has opened my heart," she replied, "it has killed all self-love, it has made me love and pity every one who has suffered, it has taught me that life is but short, and that heaven is my true home."

"It shall teach me the same," he said, "if you will help me, Eve. I loved her so dearly that my loss has almost killed me."

His pride and self-control gave way—he sobbed like a child.

"My dear old friend!" said Eve, and, as simply as a child might have done it, she drew his head upon her arm, and the first tears he shed over the great sorrow of his life fell on her kindly ministering hands.

CHAPTER XXV.

"WHY THIS MERRY CHIME TO-DAY?"

From that day a change came over Felix Lonsdale; he went home even that same evening an altered man; he opened his heart to the love and sympathy that Katie showed him. The proud, stern coldness fell from him—he took the children in his arms and kissed the little faces. He said to himself that children of his own would never climb his knees—children of his own would never gladden his heart.

He did not suffer less, but it was in another fashion now. He worked harder than ever; he said to himself that if it were possible he would drown his sorrow in the hardest work he could find. And yet he did not know the worst; he only knew that Violet had broken her promise, and declared it impossible to marry him; he had not the faintest notion that there was really any wealthy lover at hand. He believed firmly that her parents had talked to her and argued with her until she had been overruled by them. Still at Lilford—all but himself—knew that Violet was going to marry Sir Owen; it had been kept quite secret for some time, but now the day was fixed—the fourteenth of September—and there could no longer be any secrecy.

The whole place was in a ferment over it. There was to be a grand dinner given to all the tenants, to all the servants and dependents; and the bell-ringers had been told how many times a merry peal was to be rung on the old church bells, in honor of the bride and bridegroom. The only persons who knew nothing of all this were the inhabitants of Vale House—the invalid father who saw no one but the doctor and Eve Lester, the kindly, industrious young step-mother, and the young lover himself. No one cared to speak to them on such a subject, and they were the last to hear it. Even Evelyn, who never shrank from trouble, shrank from speaking to them about it.

Felix wondered one night, when she came to Vale House, why she was so kind, so tender and compassionate to him, why she hovered round him like a mother over a sick child, why she spoke such low, earnest words to him—so noble, so beautiful, that his whole soul was stirred by them.

"Felix," she said, "listen to this. It is a verse I read last night in a poem by Adelaide Anne Procter. I copied it to read to you because I thought it so beautiful." She was sitting by his side in the attitude that painters of old gave to guardian angels, so full of love and protection. In her sweet, clear voice she read to him:

"Who is the angel that cometh?
Pain!
Let us arise and go forth to greet him;
Not in vain
Is the summons come for us to meet him.
He will stay
And darken our sun;
He will stay
A desolate night, a weary day,
Since in that shadow our work is done,
And in that shadow our crowns are won.
Let us say still while his bitter chalice
Slowly into our hearts is poured—
Blessed is he that cometh
In the name of the Lord!

"It is very beautiful," he said, when the sweet voice ceased—it was as though a strain of solemn music had died away—"very beautiful. I shall remember the angel of pain, and show him a brave face, I hope, when he comes. But tell me why you speak to me in this strain to-night? It may be only my fancy, but it has seemed to me that on the face of every man and woman I have met to-day I have read pity; it must be fancy, but it seems to me so strange."

She could have told him that every man, woman, and child in Lilford knew that on the morrow Violet Haye was to marry Sir Owen. She could have told him also that there was none among them who did not feel sorry for him and indignant with her.

"I had almost begun to fear that there was something fresh concerning that unfortunate will," he said, "people have been so strange with me. It cannot be my love-story; no one knows that. People all know, of course, that Violet has gone away to London; but I do not think any one out of our own household knows that she has broken with me."

Eve could not tell him; she could help him, she could strengthen his heart and his mind, but she could not look at him and say, "To-morrow will be Violet's wedding-day." She turned away sick at heart when she remembered the treachery, the cruelty, and the deceit—sick at heart that she could not take the whole burden upon herself, and suffer for him. She was brave enough, but she

could not say to him, "The girl for love of whom you are breaking your heart thinks so little of you—so little of your pain—that she is going to marry to-morrow the man above all others whom you dislike."

She talked to him again in the same strain—of the grandeur and nobility of sorrow, the bravery of bearing pain, the cowardice of falling under a burden; and then, when she left him, she whispered to Katie:

"Be very kind to him to-morrow, *madre*. He will stand sorely in need of it."

But even Kate did not dream what the words meant.

The harvest moon that night shone down upon many different scenes. It crept into a superb room in London, where Sir Owen, flushed with love and wine, told with many an oath to a choice circle of friends how he had outwitted the lawyer and carried off his bride.

"I shall have some fine amusement with him when I return to Garswood," he said. "He must have been as vain as Narcissus himself to think that any girl would prefer him to me."

His friends drank his costly wines and applauded him—each ignoble sentiment, each mean idea—until they could do so no longer.

The moon looked in at another window—the window of a magnificent chamber, wherein lay all the details of a superb bridal costume—a lace vail of priceless value, a wreath of orange-blossoms, white satin shoes, and white gloves, with a dress that was a triumph of art. It shone on a pretty white bed whereon a young girl lay—on golden hair that was all disheveled and lying in silken profusion over the pillow—on a fair and beautiful face all stained with tears; for on this evening something like remorse had come to Violet Haye, and she had wept with a wild cry for the lover whom she had bartered for gold. Even the diamonds, the costly gems, the rich dresses, the wealth and grandeur for which she had sold herself, had not power to soothe her. The same moon shone into the room where Eve Lester knelt, her fair face raised to the evening skies, praying Heaven to help the man she loved through the bitter hour of his pain and desolation. It shone into the room where Felix sat writing because he could not sleep and was unable to find rest in anything except work. The silvery moon shone brightly over all.

Felix worked until his tired eyes could see no longer, and then he put away his papers. He had business for the

morrow, and, if he could not sleep, he said to himself that he might close his eyes and think of that.

He went to the office early the next morning, and it struck him that there was an unusual stir in the streets. A band of music passed him. He saw the people, gayly dressed, all going in the same direction. He wondered if there was a *fete* anywhere, or any fair that he had forgotten. It was the fourteenth of September—no, he could not remember that it differed from any other day. He saw that it was a very lovely morning; there was bright sunshine, a sweet western wind, while all nature looked blithe and gay; still he could not understand the commotion in the town.

He went into his office—even the clerk was not there. Without loss of time he went to work busily at his papers. Ha! Surely he was not mistaken as to the chime of the old church bells—surely they were chiming not an every-day chime—surely he heard a burst of jubilant melody, a clang of joyful sound? He opened the window, and the rich waves of sound came in upon the sunlit air.

"It is like the sound of wedding-bells," he thought to himself, "but no one has been married from here."

There was something pathetic in the handsome, wondering face leaning from the window, listening to the bells that were ringing his death-knell.

He said to himself that it was no business of his, that he must go on with his work; he should know during the day why the bells were rung. He went to his papers again, but it was impossible to write; the air was full of music, the gay, sweet chime rang out every moment. He could not write: it was as though a thousand gay and airy shapes were flitting around him. There was one consolation—the bell-ringing could not last—it must stop soon. He could not work with that mad, merry music filling the air; but he could go and ask what it all meant.

It was strange that the first person he saw was the vicar's wife, Mrs. Hunter. He asked her why the bells were ringing; and, as she looked at him, her eyes filled with tears.

"They ring for so many things," she replied—"how can I tell which it is?"

He passed on, but, as he walked away, she looked at him closely, while something like a sob rose to her lips.

"Beautiful women are beautiful fiends sometimes," said the vicar's wife to herself. "I would not have done such a thing."

Felix thought her strange—but he had almost ceased to wonder at anything. Then he met his old friend, Doctor Ludlow. He stopped and spoke to him.

"I ought to be very busy with my work," he said, "but those bells distract me. I have had to put away my writing. What are they ringing for, doctor?"

And the kind-hearted doctor looked sadly at him.

"Have you not heard?" he asked.

"No—I hear so little—I am so busy always. What is it for?"

But the doctor could not tell him.

"Go as far as the church," he said, "the walk will do you good this beautiful morning. Ask the ringers—they are sure to know."

He had not the time to spare, but the morning was fine, and some strange instinct that he could not account for hurried him on.

"Why are you ringing this merry chime to-day?" he asked of one of the ringers, a white-headed old man, whose arms were wearied, and who sat resting on one of the green graves.

"Why? Because the great Sir Owen is married to-day, Master Lonsdale."

"Married!" cried Felix. "Married to whom?"

The chiming ceased, and the wind fell as the old man answered:

"Married to Violet Haye."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE EARL'S PROMISE.

There are no finer woods in England than the woods that surround Bramber Towers. Bramber is a glorious estate, and the woods extend to Lilford. They form the massive background of trees which helps to render the old church so picturesque and artistic.

The Earl of Arlington, master of the Towers, had but one fault in the eyes of the county—he was too fond of traveling. It was no unusual thing for the Towers to be closed for two or three years, while the earl, with his wife and daughter, delighted in fair Continental cities. It was the one drawback to a noble character, for Lord Arlington was one of those fortunate men who are born with a keen sense of duty. He was a model landowner, a model landlord, a model country gentleman. When he was at the

Towers everything was sure to go well; he had a keen sense of justice—he gave himself the trouble to examine thoroughly into everything. He was never hasty, impatient, or unjust. He was almost idolized in the county. Most of the town of Lilford belonged to him, and he took the greatest possible interest in the place. He made a point of attending the public meetings; he would have justice—"Justice" was his motto. "Let justice be done, though the heavens fall" was a favorite quotation of his. Woe to any man who tried to belie another, and then fell into his hands. Woe to any voter who trifled with his votes.

Lord Arlington was a straightforward, honest, honorable Englishman—all devious ways and tortuous paths were unknown to him. It was always observed that if he were absent for any length of time things went wrong. His first concern on his return was to endeavor to set them right. He had been nearly three years this time, lingering with his beautiful wife and daughter in the quaint cities of old Spain. He reached home on the eleventh of September, and he feared that, as usual, during his absence much had gone wrong. His return was hardly known in the neighborhood, for one of the things that Lord Arlington disliked was fuss; why should there be a scene every time he returned? So he generally kept his intention secret.

The countess was a beautiful, quiet, refined woman. One of her great characteristics was her sympathetic manner She possessed that keen insight into the hearts and feelings of others which creates sympathy. It was natural to her to feel intensely the sorrows and joys of others. There were two children—the young heir, Lord Bramber, who was still at Oxford, and Lady Maude Bramber, a lovely girl about two years older than her brother.

Lady Maude inherited her mother's peculiarly sympathetic nature. She was as gifted as she was beautiful, and the one thing in which she excelled was art. She would have made one of the finest painters of the day had she not been an earl's daughter; as it was, her pictures were far superior to those of many well-known artists. It was at her solicitation that Lord Arlington returned home that autumn. She had seen the finest parts of Europe—the most picturesque—the most beautiful; but there was nothing she liked better than the fine old woods round Bramber; and she loved them best in autumn, when the leaves were falling and the glorious tints of the foliage made a picture the tints of which could not be transferred to canvas.

She had begged that they might spend the autumn at

home, for the beauty of an English autumn surpassed anything which they could see abroad. Her wish was complied with, as is the wish of a spoiled child often, and she promised herself a few pleasant months.

She set out one morning with her sketch-book and pencils. The countess suggested that she should take a maid or a footman with her—Lady Maude laughed.

"No danger lurks in our English woods, mamma," she said. "If I were in Italy or Greece I might meet a few brigands; here at Bramber there will be nothing worse than the pretty brown hares and the little squirrels. I could not sketch at my ease with a great idle man waiting for me."

So she went alone into the Bramber Woods. She wanted a few sketches of English trees in their ruby-tinted autumn dress, and some of the finest in England grew amid the fern and bracken in the Bramber Woods. She had no fear —why should she have any? The sky was blue, the sun bright and warm, the air full of music and song. As she entered the woods she fancied that she heard a faint chiming of distant bells.

"They are the bells of Lilford's old church," she said to herself; "what a mellow, rich sound. I shall not hear it presently."

It died away as she entered the beautiful green glades; the sound could not penetrate the thick masses of foliage.

"I want oak, ash, and elm," she thought; "and here I shall find all three."

There was a broad, open space, and a majestic oak spread out its great branches there. It was like a little kingdom in itself, this wonderful oak—a great green kingdom with a life all its own. Near it stood a very fine elm, and in the distance she saw the branches of a fine ash tree. Not far from here was a pretty little brook, so clear that one could see the pebbles at the bottom of it; it ran with a sweet, musical ripple that was a song in itself. The birds were having an entertainment of some kind in the green kingdom of leaves, and the noise they made over it was continuous.

As she became absorbed in the keen delight of her sketching, she forgot her feathered neighbors. They no longer disturbed her. The wind sounded like an Æolian harp among the trees, but that was music she liked; the merry rabbits hopped among the bracken and fern, the squirrels played among the spreading boughs. It was all so still, so peaceful, so beautiful that she thought she could

sit there sketching forever. Once she was disturbed; she fancied that from the long western glade on the other side of her there came the sound of reckless running footsteps, and then of a heavy fall, but after a moment or two she concluded that it was only the rabbits.

"They are having a steeplechase," she said, and laughed at the idea; then the pencil trembled in her fingers, for surely she heard the sound of terrible sobbing, great passionate, bitter sobs. She could not be mistaken—they grew more bitter and deep, and then all was still. She tried to go on with her drawing, but her hand trembled—she could not persuade herself that what she had heard was fancy. Something must have made the noise—she would go and see.

She was one of the most fearless of maidens; all the high courage and undaunted bravery of her race lived in her. She put her drawing materials aside, and went toward the place whence the sound had proceeded. Her heart beat fast when she saw before her the prostrate figure of a man. There was no sobbing now, only a death-like silence, and the man lay with his face downward. She did not faint, or scream, or run away, but she listened for his breathing, this dainty daughter of a noble race. Was he dead? Had he swooned? Was he hurt? She grew pale, and trembled when, on the cool green grass, she detected stains of blood. Once, twice she spoke to him, and then she raised his head, and looked into his face. How handsome it was—just such a face as she had seen given to a Greek god—such a face as she had seen in marble in the dim light of old Roman galleries. Then she saw that on the temple, so white, so rounded, so full of ideality, there was a terrible wound. A moment's reflection showed her what the wound was. Just above him was the branch of a tree. He must have been running in hot haste, and, not seeing the branch with its sharp, jagged edge, had run against it. He had fallen there, and had swooned, probably because the blow had stunned him.

What a handsome face it was, but how terribly marked with pain! What did all those great lines mean on the fair brow and round, beautiful mouth? Warm pity and tender compassion rose in her heart for him. She laid the helpless head on the grass again, and went and dipped her handkerchief in the brook. She laid it on his brow; she bound up the cruel, gaping wound, and she looked like an angel of compassion bending over him. Suddenly, to her great relief, he opened his eyes and gazed at her.

"Violet!" he said.

"I am not Violet," she replied.

She saw his whole face change.

"Oh, Eve, Eve," he said, "you told me of the angel of pain, but the trial was more than I could bear."

"I am not Eve," she told him, gently, but from the dim, shadowed look in his eyes she knew that he did not hear her.

Gently and quietly, with softest touch, she bathed his hot brow with the cool water of the brook until she saw that his senses had returned to him.

"I found you here, badly hurt," she said.

He tried to rise, but he was quite unable to stir. She laid her hand upon his arm.

"No," she said, "you must not try to stand—you will feel better soon. You are dazed and giddy—you must have struck your head against this branch. Where were you running so quickly?"

"Away from the sound of the bells," he answered. "I knew that I should not hear them in the depths of the Bramber Woods."

"Did they distress you?" she asked. "I thought them so beautiful."

"They drove me mad—they were killing me," he replied. Then, with a low cry, he bent his face toward the long grass.

"I feel sure that I have seen you before," she said. "Do you know me? I am Lady Bramber; and you—I have seen you at the Towers. Surely you are Mr. Felix Lonsdale, the dear old lawyer's son?"

He looked at her.

"Yes, I am Felix Lonsdale," he replied; "and I begin to think that Heaven has placed a black cross against my name. I ought to have known you, Lady Maude. I remember you now, but my head was all confused."

"Your face is quite familiar to me," said Lady Maude. "You came to the Towers with your father—it is four years since—and you took luncheon with us. I showed you some of my drawings, and you were very shy. It comes back to me so vividly. But, Mr. Lonsdale, why were you running from the sound of those bells?"

She saw a spasm of pain pass over his handsome face; his lips trembled.

"Do not agitate yourself," she said, kindly. "Do not tell me if it pains you."

"All the world—all my world—knows it," he replied. "I

will tell you, Lady Maude. I ran, mad, blind, reckless, from those bells because they are chiming in honor of the marriage of the girl I loved—the girl who had promised to marry me."

"Surely," said Lady Maude, with a light breaking over her face, "you do not mean your pretty, golden-haired sweetheart, Violet Haye? Your father told us about her that day at the Towers."

"Yes; she has married Sir Owen Chevenix to-day, and the wedding-bells were driving me mad."

"Poor boy," said Lady Maude, rather to herself than to him, "I am not surprised at it. You shall not tell me about it now," added Lady Maude, after a silence of some few seconds. "It is the old story, I suppose, of trust and love, folly and treachery. Tell me of your home, your father—I was always very fond of your father. How is he?"

Sympathy was so sweet. They were sitting under the great boughs of the spreading elm. Lady Maude's just and gentle heart ached with pity for him. It seemed to him such relief to talk to her. He felt weak and languid—woman's sweet, soft words, woman's pity and sympathy, were very acceptable to him just then.

He did not speak of Violet, but he told her the story of his father's bitter trials—how Mrs. Hardman's money was left to them, how happy it had made them, what plans and hopes they had built on it; then of the disputed will, the trial, the verdict; how his father's business had fallen away from him, and his old friends had one by one deserted him, all but Eve Lester; and he told her how Eve had come to offer her fortune to them.

Lady Maude's eyes filled with tears as she listened.

"That is a girl after my own heart," she said. "That is just one of the things I should have done myself. But do you mean to tell me, Mr. Lonsdale, that this is the outcome of English law? I have never heard of so cruel a case. All who know your father know that he is as incapable of doing wrong as any man in England—in fact, he would not do wrong—he is one of the honestest and noblest of men. I have always heard him so highly spoken of. You do not mean to say that his fellow-townsmen and the old friends who have known him for years stand aloof from him for this?"

She spoke with angry indignation that did his heart good to hear.

"It is true," he replied; "and, what is more, they have

withdrawn their business from him—some under one pretext, some under another. We have had a struggle such as few could understand, and my great fear is that my father will never be a strong man again."

"He wants reaction," she said—"something that would put him back into his place—that would reinstate him in public opinion; and he shall have it. I will tell this story, just as you have told it to me, to the earl, my father, and I am sure this is one of the wrongs he will hasten to redress. I am glad that I have seen you, glad that you have trusted me. There has been a gross miscarriage of justice."

"Human laws must always be more or less imperfect," returned Felix. "It is only the Divine laws that have no flaw."

"Tell me more of Eve Lester," said Lady Maude. "Your fair, false Violet does not interest me, but Eve Lester does. I love noble women—tell me more of her."

He told of her patience, her heroism, her noble, gentle, generous life; and Lady Maude, looking at him, wondered why, when he understood the beauty of her fair soul so well, he had not loved her in preference to Violet.

"Men are all the same," she thought; "a fair face will lead them in any direction. They lose their heads when beauty comes upon the scene; they are not strong-minded as a rule." Then with a smile she looked up at Felix.

"The little mouse in the fable freed the lion. I will be the mouse in this instance, and I promise you such help for your father as shall make his trouble really a blessing in disguise."

He thought of Eve's words and repeated them to her. She smiled.

"Your friend Eve is right," she said. "Sorrow is often a blessing in disguise. I am glad that I have met you; you will go home all the happier for knowing that the hour of your father's triumph is at hand. You will have something to distract your thoughts from fair, false Violet; and, remembering my promise, the fourteenth of September, her wedding-day, will not be the most unhappy day of your life after all."

He thanked her until the tears came into her eyes again, and then he told her that he was better, and asked her to let him walk with her to the end of the wood. When he tried to stand up, he looked very white and ill—she almost feared for him; but the giddiness soon passed, and they walked together to where she had left her drawing materials. He thanked her again and again so simply and ear-

nestly that she was charmed. Then she left him, and went away home.

* * * * * * * *

Felix had intended to take up his burden bravely and carry it nobly, but human love and human passion were too strong for him—he could not face the world just yet. He staid all night in the shelter of the Bramber Woods, doing hard battle with his despair; he watched the sun set, and the moon rise; he watched the golden stars come out one by one; he watched the checkered shadows that the moon threw upon the grass; he listened to the wind as it sang its sweet song; he thought of all the moonlit nights on which he had met Violet. He fell asleep for a few short moments, and dreamed that he stood under the wet lilac bushes with her; her arms were clasped around his neck, her beautiful face was raised to his, and she was scolding him that even in a dream he could believe her false. He woke with a cry of rapture. There lay the cold moonlight, there stood the giant trees, and Violet had married Sir Owen.

All night he staid there. It was the one terrible battle of his life. He was not ashamed to impart all his sorrow to the listening stars. They had listened to Œnone's wailing when beautiful Paris left his love. This story of man's love and woman's folly, of man's trust and woman's treachery, of love forsaken and forsworn, was nothing new to them. There were times that night when he almost went mad, when he cried aloud for death. But Heaven was merciful, and death came not. The morning light found him pale, weak, and exhausted, but that one fierce paroxysm had taken the sting of his sorrow away. It was better than if he had gone home and been ill for long days and weeks. That one fierce night of pain exhausted him; when it had passed he was too weak and too tired to suffer more.

He went home in the full light of morning, and found Katie waiting for him. She had guessed what had happened. She had not spoken of his absence, but she looked anxiously at his face when he came in. He bent down and kissed her.

"It is all over, *madre*," he said. "Now I shall live down my pain."

Katie looked sadly at the wound on his broad, white brow.

"How did you cut yourself so terribly, Felix?" she

asked; and he told her. It was one of his great merits that he never spoke a false or evasive word.

On that same night Lady Chevenix sat with her husband in a first-class railway carriage on the road to Paris. They were to spend their honey-moon there, and they had left Dover by that night's steamer. As the night grew darker and the red lights of the signals passed more quickly, she fell into a deep, troubled slumber. Her husband looked with exulting pride at the marvelous face with its exquisite beauty; he was glad that she slept—it would rest her and would help to while the hours away. He tried to sleep, but it was impossible. He was exultant, triumphant; he had won the only thing wanting to complete the happiness of his life. His heart hungered as he looked at the graceful figure of his wife. He noted with pride and pleasure how the handsome traveling-dress became her sweet loveliness.

The folly of that lawyer to imagine that such a woman as this was born to live in a place like Lilford. His year's income would not find her a decent dress. He will recognize his mistake when he sees Lady Chevenix.

It was strange that no feeling of pity for his rival or remorse for his own behavior crossed his mind. He did not seem even to understand that he had done a dishonorable thing. He had outwitted another man, and he was delighted. Then he saw the face that he was watching grow paler in sleep. Suddenly his young wife awoke with a loud cry. He saw her look at both her hands, while her white lips trembled.

"What is it, Violet? he asked.

"A dream," she replied, shuddering, "only a dream."

"Very horrid things they are, too, sometimes," he said. "What did you dream"?

She was still looking at her hands, rubbing the softly-tinted gloves as though she would fain rub something from them. She was too confused to be quick at invention.

"What did you dream?" he repeated, and there was a certain sharpness in his voice.

"I thought that I held a human heart in my hand, and that it was bleeding," she replied.

"That would do for a sensation novel, Violet," he said, laughing. "You have something better than a heart in your hand—you have a diamond ring on your finger worth two hundred pounds, and you have a wedding-ring that makes you Lady Chevenix. Go to sleep again, but dream

of diamonds, my dear, not hearts—as whist players say, diamonds are trumps."

But sleep had gone from Violet; she watched the skies until morning dawned, and more than once, although she was Lady Chevenix of Garswood, one of the wealthiest women in England, she wished that it were all undone, and that she was Violet Haye again.

On that same night Lady Maude and Lord Arlington talked long and earnestly. She told him the story that she had heard, and asked him for help. He thought long over it.

"I know of one way in which I can help him, Maude," he said, "but that will require consideration." Then he said a few words in a low voice.

She clasped her hands.

"Will you do that, papa?" she interrogated. "That would be one of the grandest things in the world. I shall be so pleased—far more pleased than at any good fortune which could happen to myself."

"I will think of it," replied Lord Arlington, and when he spoke in the tone that he did then his daughter knew that he was determined to accomplish what he had in view.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A TRUE NOBLEMAN.

There was great excitement in the town of Lilford. As one man said to another, they might alway expect something strange when the earl came home; but this was stranger than all. The earl's tenants, and every man in Lilford with whom he did business of any kind, received an invitation to dine with the earl at the "Bramber Arms."

The "Bramber Arms" was the chief hotel in Lilford. It boasted of a large assembly room, where the county balls and the hunt balls were all given. It was the very stronghold and fortress of the aristocracy of the neighborhood, and its resources were wonderful. The dinner to the tenants was to be served in the assembly room. People called it a rent dinner, such as the earl generally gave to his tenants once a year; but they agreed that there was something more in it than that, or why were so many bidden who were not tenants? Why were the doctors, the vicar, and every other person with whom the earl had any business relations asked, and many more besides? The earl, it was remarked, rode or drove through Lilford almost every day,

and he was sure each day to give three or four invitations. Public expectation and excitement increased. What could the earl mean by such unlimited hospitality?

The proprietor of the "Bramber Arms" gave glowing accounts of the dinner that was to be prepared. No expense was to be spared. He was to provide the most costly wines, the choicest dishes. He declared that during his business career he had known nothing like it.

Felix heard of the grand banquet, the rent dinner, as it was called, and went home one evening pleased to have some news that would interest his father. When he reached Vale House he was astonished to find that two letters of invitation were there before him, one for his father and one for himself.

"That is wonderful," he said. "Why has the earl invited us?"

Nor was his wonder much decreased when in his father's letter he read a few words written in the earl's own handwriting, and signed "Arlington"—a few kindly words, begging Mr. Lonsdale, if possible, to be present, as he very much wished to see him.

"That means good news for you, father," he said. He had never mentioned his interview with Lady Maude, neither had he forgotten it.

Mr. Lonsdale shook his head gravely.

"There will be no more good news for me in this world, my dear boy—no second Will-o'-the-wisp will ever lead me astray. For the future I shall believe in nothing but what I see."

"You will find I am right," said Felix. "You will go, father, will you not?"

"Yes, I will go, just to show my fellow-townsmen that, while they treat me as a thief or a swindler, the Earl of Arlington treats me as a gentleman. I will go, if only to show them that. Yet I have some misgivings, Felix. If they avoid me as they have done it will kill me. Felix, what if his lordship has heard nothing of this story, and has invited me in ignorance? What if, when he finds it out, he avoids me, too?"

"My dear father, why dwell on trifles? Lord Arlington says expressly that he wishes to see you. Surely you do not doubt his word? He has been so much in Lilford lately that you may be quite sure he has heard the whole history."

In his heart Felix felt certain that Lady Maude had told her father all about it, and that this invitation of the earl's

had something to do with her communication. He placed his arm caressingly around his father's neck.

"You must get better, father," he said, "and come with me."

"I will, Felix; I will do my best," he replied.

Eve Lester came and talked to him; Kate cheered him, and between them the sorrow-stricken man took courage, and resolved to go among his friends again. Friends or foes, no matter which, he would go among them.

Kate will never forget how she helped him to dress, how she quieted the trembling nerves, while Eve cheered him with brave words.

"I shall remain here until you return," she said, "for I am quite certain you will bring good news with you, though I cannot think what the good news will be."

"I am quite at a loss to imagine why both Eve and you, Felix, should think good fortune lies in store for me," observed Darcy Lonsdale. "I have been under a shadow too long."

But Felix would not listen to one desponding word.

They had engaged a fly to carry them to the "Bramber Arms," and both father and son were surprised at the decorations, the flags, the evergreens, the arches of welcome.

"People show great respect to Lord Arlington," said Darcy Lonsdale, "and well they may, for he is a just man."

Then together father and son entered the assembly room, where the grand banquet was laid. They saw the earl at the top of the room, surrounded by a group of gentlemen.

"I shall go straight to him, Felix," said the lawyer; "there shall be no mistake about it. I will not sit at his table under false pretenses."

"You shall do as you will, father; where you lead I will follow," was Felix's reply.

Darcy Lonsdale walked up to the earl, but, before he had time to speak to him, Lord Arlington held out his hand and shook his with a hearty grasp.

"I am delighted to see you, Mr. Lonsdale," he said, warmly.

But Darcy Lonsdale, looking into the earl's face, said:

"My lord, before I take advantage of your kindness, let me ask you if you have heard my story—if you have heard that I have been charged with influencing one of my clients to leave me money?"

"Yes, I have heard it," replied the earl.

"Have you heard that a jury of my own countrymen

found me guilty, and that my fellow-townsmen—the old friends whom I have spent all my life among—in their own minds found me guilty, too, and have shown their opinion, most of them, by withdrawing their business from me—the old friends I loved and served, my lord?"

The earl took his hand again.

"I have heard it, Mr. Lonsdale, and regret it. I am glad to have this chance of saying publicly that I disbelieve all that has been said about your guilt, and am proud to take the hand of an honest, injured man."

"I thank you, my lord," returned Darcy Lonsdale.

His wonder increased when the earl, turning to him, said:

"Your place, Mr. Lonsdale, is at my right hand."

The lawyer looked at him in amazement. Lord Arlington smiled.

"Yes, at my right hand," he said, "and after dinner you will know the reason why."

Wondering at this, Darcy Lonsdale took his seat.

"Your son will sit next to you," said Lord Arlington. "I shall want him as well."

Mr. Lonsdale saw the looks of wonder from all the gentlemen assembled.

"They are not accustomed to see me so honored," he said to himself, bitterly.

Then the grand banquet began, and it was one long remembered in Lilford, because of its grandeur and costliness; those who partook of it described it in few words—it was worthy of the earl who gave it. It came to a close at last, and the earl ordered some more wine.

"I shall have a toast to propose presently, gentlemen," he said, "for which I shall want brimming glasses. Before giving it, however, I have a few words to say to you."

Silence, deep and impressive, fell over them; when the earl spoke in the tone that he did he meant something. There was not the faintest sound when he began.

"Gentlemen, old friends, and neighbors I may say, there has been an injustice done among you which I have asked you here to-day to set straight. Understand me plainly, as an Englishman I uphold the legal institutions of my country. I bow my head to the decision of a judge; I listen with respect to the verdict of a jury. But, gentlemen, human laws, just because they are human and not divine, must at times err; and I say they erred when they pronounced a man, as honest, industrious, and honorable as my friend Darcy Lonsdale capable of influencing a woman

to leave him her money. Gentlemen, the judge who gave sentence against him was a stranger to him, and the jury who decided in favor of the heir-at-law did not know him. But you know him; he has lived among you all his life, he has served you to the best of his knowledge, and not one among you, man, woman, or child, can say that he has ever spoken a false word or done a mean or underhand deed. He has always been industrious, honest, and generous—one of those men who make the very backbone of Old England—a loyal subject, a spirited townsman, a true friend, a devoted husband, a kind father. He has spent his life among you, and not one of you can say that you have ever known him to do wrong. If you can, speak."

There was a dead silence which lasted for some moments, and then a voice said:

"You are right, my lord. Not one among us has ever known him to do wrong."

"I am sure not," declared the earl. "Now mind what I say. With the jury and the judge who thought James Hardman entitled to Elizabeth Hardman's money, and who really believed that Darcy Lonsdale had wrongfully used his great influence with her, I have nothing to do. They did their duty honestly, even if mistakenly. To you who constituted yourselves judge and jury—to you who, knowing the man and his character, judged him yourselves as guilty—to you I wish to speak. I believe him to be innocent. I have read carefully since my return every word of the trial, and I say before you all, in the most emphatic words that I can use, that I believe him to be innocent, and, what is more, to be a deeply injured man."

He was obliged to stop, for there rose from the lips of the men who had misjudged Darcy Lonsdale, who had shunned him, who had withdrawn their business from him, who had half broken his honest heart by their conduct, a cheer such as had never been heard in Lilford. Perhaps in their hearts they had never quite believed him guilty. Perhaps the earl's noble words touched them with compunction and regret. Something appealed to them, and they cheered until the walls of the "Bramber Arms" shook again.

"We are agreed, then, gentlemen," said the earl. "Our old friend and fellow-townsman is an honest, honorable gentleman."

They cheered again and again. It was with some difficulty that the earl could make himself heard. At last silence was restored, and then he continued:

"We can never make up to him for all that he has suffered; we cannot give him back the strength, the hope, the happiness he has lost; we cannot atone for the wretched hours, the sleepless nights, and the weary days—all that is beyond us. But I have thought of a plan by which we may aid him, and I want the close attention of every gentleman present while I propose it."

The earl paused for one moment, and those seated at his hospitable table looked earnestly at him; there was still deeper silence when he began to speak again.

"There is no secrecy in England. Everything done in the country is as open as the sea that surrounds it. Our newspapers ventilate everything, and in one sense that is quite right; but in a case like this it is hard. Throughout the length and breadth of England men have read how Darcy Lonsdale's case went against him, and how he lost the money left to him. I want something else to go through the length and breadth of the land; I want people to read how Darcy Lonsdale's friends and townsmen—myself at their head—met and expressed their sympathy with him, and that they presented him with a handsome testimonial to show their full confidence in him and to make up for his loss. That testimonial I propose to head myself with five hundred pounds, and I venture to say there will not be a nobleman or a gentleman in the county who will not add his name to the list."

Cheers again arose—never had the "Bramber Arms" heard such cheers. Darcy Lonsdale's face had grown deathly pale, but for the strong arm of his son thrown around him, he would have fallen.

"I have one word more to say, gentlemen," continued the earl, "and it is this. My agent, Mr. John Sleaman, a gentleman whom you all know and respect, is leaving me. I am glad to say that a fortune has fallen to him, and that he is going to enjoy it. I propose now to ask Mr. Darcy Lonsdale to take his post. The emoluments are good—one thousand per annum and a house to live in. If he will accept the office I shall be proud to place my interests, my welfare, my property, in the hands of a worthy, honest, and honorable gentleman. Yet one word more. Mr. Lonsdale is no longer young, but he has a son—I wish we all had such a son—and I propose that he acts, if necessary, in his father's place, always, of course, with his authority; if he does, I shall secure two good agents instead of one. Gentlemen, join me in drinking the health of a valued,

trusted townsman, of an honest, honorable man, my agent, Darcy Lonsdale."

It was drank with such honors as a man's name seldom receives. Then Darcy Lonsdale rose and turned his white face to them, but he could make no speech—the only words his trembling lips could utter were:

"Heaven bless you, my lord. I cannot thank you, though you have made a man of me again. My dear old friends and neighbors, how could you have misjudged me? But you see now that it was all a mistake. I am glad of it. In future we will deal gently with each other, we will judge each other mercifully. Lord Arlington, you have saved my honor; henceforward command me as you will." Then, unable to say any more, he sat down.

Doctor Hunter was the first to leave his place and shake hands with him.

"I never believed one word of the story, Mr. Lonsdale," he said, "although I confess that I have avoided you. Will you shake hands and let the past be past?"

After that the guests went up to the lawyer one by one and shook his hand. Some frankly avowed that they had misjudged him, some begged his pardon, some said that they had gone with the many, but every man present wished him well and Godspeed in his new life.

The speech worth hearing when that scene had passed, when justice had been done to an injured man, when peace had been made, was when Doctor Hunter stood up to propose Lord Arlington's health. Never was a toast so received, for there is nothing after all which touches an Englishman's heart sooner than defense of the weak, love of justice, and generosity.

It was the most successful evening ever known, and it did an immense deal of good; there was not a man present who did not learn a lesson from the earl, who did not resolve in his heart to be more merciful, more pitiful, more charitable, who did not say to himself that he would be more careful in judging another time. And it was a strange thing that, when they came to compare notes there was not a man among them who had really believed the lawyer guilty; they had gone only with what they thought was public opinion—one had removed his business from the office because another had, one had avoided Darcy Lonsdale because another had. But the earl had taught them a lesson which went home to each heart.

It was such a pleasant evening, and Lord Arlington had so contrived matters that Darcy Lonsdale was the real hero

and not himself. He was all that was most kind and considerate; he talked to him, and won his son's heart forever. But in everything he put Darcy first, so that people might understand all this had been done for him. Was it any wonder that when he was gone the men stood in little groups, each one praising him?

Felix followed him to the door of his carriage, and said:

"My lord, your life is filled, so people say, with great and generous actions, but none could be so great, so generous, so noble, as that which you have done to-day."

"I have only done justice, my dear boy," said the earl, kindly. "Your father was an injured man; I have tried to set him straight. *Au reste*, I wanted a good agent, and I have found one."

"You cannot make light of the deed," returned Felix; "it is a good one. My father appears to be a new man to-night; there is a light on his face and fire in his eyes that I have not seen for long months. The miracle has been worked by you—you have removed the false reproach attaching to his name; I can fancy, but I cannot tell you, what our home will be like to-night. My heart beats fast when I think of the mother and the children there, my lord. I am not very eloquent, and I am moved too much for words—I can only echo my father's request, command me as you will."

The earl was more touched than he liked to show, by the emotion on the handsome young face.

"I will make you this one promise, Mr. Felix Lonsdale," he said, "if ever I want a service done, or want a friend, I will come to you."

"Thank you, my lord," responded Felix, and when the earl drove off home he knew that he had left some of the happiest hearts in England behind him.

No wonder that they praised and blessed him; he was a kind-hearted man, who knew how to use his influence in a noble manner—one of those men who, to keep alive in the hearts of the people a love for their rulers, do more than many orators and statesmen put together.

What a night it was! The vicar drove away soon after the earl had left, and then one by one the company dwindled down to about twenty. These would not let Darcy Lonsdale leave them—they had so much to say to him, and were so anxious to make up to him for their coldness, and when the host grew anxious they would not separate until they had sung "Auld Lang Syne" in chorus. Then they

escorted father and son to Vale House, where Eve and Katie anxiously awaited them.

"I am quite sure," said Eve, springing from her seat, "that I hear them, and that is Mr. Lonsdale laughing—do you hear, Katie?—laughing—and he has never laughed since the trial! Now I know there is good news."

There was good news in very truth, and the pity was that Lord Arlington was not there to see Kate clasp her arms around her husband's neck and sob out that she always knew matters would come right—that he was so good Heaven was sure to make his innocence clear. Presently she looked at him with tremulous lips.

"Is it really true, Darcy, that you are to be the earl's agent, and have a thousand a year? I can hardly believe that it is all true."

"It is true, Kate," he replied. "Eve, my dear, what have you to say to me, my true friend—the one true friend who loved me well enough to offer me her fortune if I would take it? Eve, I shall never forget that."

It had been arranged that Eve should spend the night at Vale House, so they sat around the fire until they were quite ashamed of the hour, and Felix repeated every one of the earl's noble words, while the two ladies listened in raptures; every time he paused they said, "Go on, Felix," until he assured them that he had repeated every word.

"So it will be printed in every paper in England?" said Kate. "Well, my only puzzle is, what could have inspired Lord Arlington to do such a kind and generous action?"

Felix knew that Lady Maude had been the chief instigator of it, but that was a secret he never told—he kept it all his life. It was Darcy Lonsdale who answered his wife's question.

"My dear Kate," he said, "Lord Arlington has a love of seeing justice done. I remember when he raised half the county because some wrong had been done to a toll-gate keeper. It was such men as he who made old England what she is, and who made the word 'England' a synonym for honor."

And then these simple people, who had been through the fiery furnace of suffering, who had borne sorrow, shame, and disgrace, who had never ventured to hope for justice in this world, knelt and thanked Heaven for their rescue; and Darcy Londsale's eyes grew dim with grateful tears as he opened his Bible and read how the just and merciful Creator saves those who put their trust in Him.

Gradually they awoke to the full reality of the good for-

tune that had befallen them. The strength of his youth seemed to have returned to Darcy Lonsdale; he took his place once more among his townsmen, he went briskly to and from his office, he worked hard at his business, the clerks came back one by one to the office, and far more than its ancient glory returned to the house of Lonsdale & Son.

Katie could not rest until she had seen the earl, in order to thank him, and the little lady went over to Bramber Towers and asked for an interview. She tried to thank him in a dignified, matronly fashion, and ended by falling upon her knees and kissing his hand, very much to the earl's confusion and delight. It was a new life for them all, and the warmth of it cheered and brightened them more than anything had ever done before.

The day came when Darcy Lonsdale put his arm lovingly on his son's shoulder, and said:

"Do not think, Felix, that in the midst of my troubles and of my prosperity I have given no thought to you. I am doing the best I can for you by giving you so much work that you will have no time to regret your lost love."

"My dear father, I shall regret her until I die," returned Felix.

"The young always think both their love and their sorrow immortal. I will say now what I have never said before, because I thought it would pain you—I thought she was not worthy of such love as yours. She had nothing but a beautiful face to recommend her—her soul was not beautiful, her heart was not true. The time will come when you will say that you had a fortunate escape. I pray Heaven that it may be so."

But Felix looked grave; the world must come to an end before he could see a silver lining to that cloud—the cloud of his misplaced, unhappy love.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"I HEAR NOTHING BUT THE LONSDALES."

Lady Chevenix wrote a long letter home, telling her mother how greatly she was enjoying Paris—how she had been to one of the State balls at the Tuileries, and how the emperor had danced with her—and Mrs. Haye, on her side, made all the ladies round Lilford envious by telling them how her "dear child, Lady Chevenix," was enjoying herself

in Paris, and what a favorite she was at the Imperial Court.

Sir Owen was very kind to Violet in those days, and she was so completely dazzled by the novelty of all she saw that she never remembered Felix, except to congratulate herself on her own good sense in having given him his *conge.* Some slight indications of impatience made her think that Sir Owen had a certain amount of bad temper, but at present he had shown none to her—indeed, she thought him far better than he had represented himself. He had told her that he gambled and drank. She had seen nothing of these bad habits; she was too inexperienced to detect that he had placed a restraint on himself which might break down any day.

She did not like him very much. Although he was a baronet and a man of wealth, he was not a thorough gentleman. That she must have known. Thorough gentlemen are men of honor—and the man who steals the promised wife of another man can hardly be placed under that category. She found that Sir Owen was coarse in his manners, coarse in his speech. She often, even in those early days, shrank from him, saying:

"You talk so strangely, Owen—I do not understand you."

"Then you must have some lessons, my charming wife," he would answer, laughingly, following up the remark by speech that was anything but refined.

That was done in good-humor; what he could be when that humor changed she had yet to find out. She did not love him—she never made the least pretense of loving him. She was kind to him; she tried to talk to him, to amuse him, she obeyed his wishes, and made herself very amiable and charming—not because she loved him, but because he was the means of procuring her all the luxury, the magnificence, the pleasure that she now enjoyed. In his coarse way he felt that.

He brought her home one day a set of sapphires so brilliant and rare that she cried out with rapture when she saw them.

"There are no sapphires finer than these," he remarked. "What do you say for them, Violet?"

"I say 'Thank you' with all my heart," she cried.

"Is that all, Violet?"

"What more can I say, except that you are good, kind, and generous?"

"Can you think of nothing else, Violet?" he asked. She looked puzzled.

"I cannot, indeed, Owen; but I will say anything you wish me to say."

He turned away impatiently.

"If you thought any set form of words, any pretty phrase would please me, you would use it—I am quite sure of that."

With the brilliant sapphires in one of her hands, she looked half wistfully at him; the man who had it in his power to make such presents as this was worth any amount of patience.

"I would say anything to please you, Owen," she said.

He looked into her fair face.

"I knew you would," he returned, "but it has never occurred to you to throw your arms around my neck and kiss me, and—and say, 'Thank you, my darling.' "

She shrank from him with a little shudder, his dark face was so close to hers.

"I have noticed," he said, "that you are always ready to thank me when I bring you any of the silly trifles women like so much—you are then most amiable, but never once, by Heaven, since we have been married have you come to me and kissed me of your own free will."

"I will do so now," she said, and she placed the sapphires in their cases.

"No, thank you," he returned. "It would not be spontaneous. You would do it because I asked you."

She was startled at the expression of his face, at the tone of his voice—startled, and just a little afraid.

"You do love me, Violet, do you not?" he asked.

She had never thought about loving him; he was to her a rich man who had wanted her to marry him, who had bribed her by his riches and his title, and for whom she had given up the man she really loved; but to love him—she had never thought of it; it had never entered into her calculations. He was to have her beauty, she was to have his money and his title.

"Do you love me, Violet?" he demanded, angrily, and before she had time to speak a sudden conviction darted through her mind that she did not love him, and never should—a certain terrible conviction that, although she was married to this man, she loved Felix Lonsdale still.

She trembled as she answered:

"Yes, you know I love you, Owen."

She knew the words were false, but she was too frightened to say anything else.

"I know you ought to love me," he said, savagely, "but

there is no understanding a woman—fair dealing is not characteristic of the sex. Still I should not like to think that you married me for my money, and for nothing else. Did you, Violet?"

She was not clever at lying, although she had broken a noble heart by her weakness. She had not the quick, ready fashion of speaking falsely which she acquired afterward. She buried her face in her hands; it was easier to weep, after the weak fashion of women, than to speak.

"Nay, I did not mean to pain you, Violet," he said. "Do not cry. Still I should like to know that you love me. No man would like to think that his wife had married him for his money."

After that little scene Lady Chevenix did not feel quite so sure of her husband, and began to stand a little in awe of him.

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The gay French capital might be as gay as it would be, Sir Owen would not remain. Invitations poured in upon him and his beautiful young wife—he would not accept them. One of his fixed resolves was to be in England at Christmas, and to England he was determined to go. In vain Violet pleaded that Garswood at Christmas would be dull. He laughed at the notion.

"No place is ever dull where I am, Violet," he cried. "That shows how little you know me. I shall fill the place with visitors of my own choosing—and I promise you that we shall not spend our time in singing psalms."

That was the first dissension between Violet and her husband. She would fain have remained longer, but Sir Owen was tired of Paris. He liked English sports, English habits, and English cheer. He was angry that Violet should for one moment presume to like Paris. It was unheard of, he said, that any Englishwoman should find Christmas at home dull. And that was the first time that Violet saw him in a rage. He swore loudly—not at her—that was to come later on. He declared the whole race of women foolish and idiotic. He frightened her so that she was glad to escape from his presence, and give orders for the packing up.

"I am not my own mistress, after all," she said, with a discontented look on her fair face. "I cannot do as I like. I never dreamed that I should have a master."

She did not like the idea. She had been so free and unfettered all her life that it was new to her to be under con

trol. She had yet to learn that Sir Owen had the obstinacy of twenty men, and that when he had once set his mind upon anything he would carry it through. Her wishes, caprices, fancies, and desires would have about as much effect upon him as summer waves have upon a weather-beaten rock.

She had a sample of this when they reached Calais on their return to England. It was not wet weather, but there had been a terrible gale, and the sea was rough. Violet was a bad sailor, and when she heard the surf beating on the shore she begged of her husband to delay their passage at least twenty-four hours. She was so afraid, she said, of a rough sea.

He laughed. It was all nonsense—the sea would not hurt her. No one ever heard of an accident to the Dover and Calais boats.

She allowed that, but the passage made her very ill. Would he not wait?

"If you are ill, you will soon be well again; the whole passage does not occupy two hours. You must bear it as other people do."

"I did not think you could be so unkind to me, Owen," she said, piteously.

"I am not unkind; but I warn you fairly that I have very little patience with the caprices of women. As for their other nonsense, I should never bear it. A man cannot be expected to go on honey-mooning forever. That kind of thing is all over now, and we may as well take our proper places. Mine is to be master—and I tell you quite frankly that I intend to be obeyed. Make up your mind to that, and we shall get along all right. Thwart me, and we shall not agree."

They were not very pleasant words for a bride of only a few weeks to hear. She thought over them for some time.

"Felix would never have spoken to me in that fashion," she said to herself. "But I must obey. There is no help for it—he is supreme master."

She was very ill crossing the Channel, but Sir Owen only laughed. Sea-sickness was a sort of jest to him. He never dreamed that his young wife would resent the laughter, but she did. When they landed at Dover she would not speak to him. He might be master, she said to herself, a hundred times over, but no man should laugh at her.

"You are sulking with me," he said, laughingly. "Ah, my Lady Chevenix, you will find that a losing game! I do not think there is a person in all England—man or woman

—who can sulk so long or so thoroughly as I can myself," and that she found to be perfectly true.

Neither of them had the faintest idea of self-control—it was a thing unknown to either of them—so they reached Garswood without exchanging a word on the journey. Their coming home was quite unexpected, consequently there was no rejoicing. It was night, too, and cold. Sir Owen was not well pleased at their reception, although he had expressly forbidden any one to write.

But Violet's spirits rose again when she found herself in the magnificent mansion. After all, her husband might be coarse and bad-tempered, but she was mistress of those superb rooms. This was her house. She was to live in the midst of all this luxury, with troops of liveried servants at her call. Still she did not say to herself now that it was all hers. She was beginning to understand that for her everything depended on the humor of her husband. It was not all hers, but she was at liberty to enjoy it. She was so pleased that Sir Owen recovered his good-humor, and the first evening they spent together at Garswood was perhaps the happiest they ever had there.

On the morrow Sir Owen found a hundred things that required his attention; nevertheless, he was thoughtful about his young wife.

"You will like to see your mother and father, Violet," he said. "Order the carriage when you like. I cannot go with you, but I will come for you. You bought some presents for them, did you not?"

"Yes," she answered.

She looked wistfully at him. It was her first visit since her marriage, and she would have liked him to be with her, but she was beginning to understand that she must not interfere with his arrangements. She could not resist saying:

"I should enjoy it so much more if you were with me, Owen."

"Oh, no, you would not!" he laughed, carelessly. "You only fancy so. You and your mother will have so much to talk about that I really could not stand it, you know—I could not, indeed. I will be there in the evening, and will drive you back home."

She knew that to say more would be quite useless, so she made the best of the arrangement. After all, there were many delights before her. She had a superb costume, trimmed with costly sable—one of the great Worth's masterpieces—and she was to wear that for the first time. Her

heart beat as she thought of the pleasure of driving in her magnificent carriage through the streets of Lilford, dressed in her Parisian costume.

"I hope that I shall meet Lady Rolfe," she said, "just for the pleasure of cutting her."

She drove at once to the Limes, and was met with the kindest of welcomes.

"I should have gone to meet you, Violet, had I known that you were coming," said Mrs. Haye.

But Lady Chevenix thought that under the circumstances it was just as well she had not come.

They went to the drawing-room together. Francis Haye was more of an invalid than usual that day, and his daughter, on hearing that he was asleep, would not have him disturbed.

"Let us have a long talk, mamma," she said. "I have so much to tell you."

They sat down to exchange confidences, and Mrs. Haye almost trembled with delight as she looked at her daughter.

"How well you look, Violet!" she said. "What a superb dress, and how it becomes you! Are you very happy, my dear?"

"As happy as other people, I suppose, mamma. I am very rich, and that must mean that I am very happy. It will take me a whole day to show you my dresses and jewels."

"Will you stand up, Violet? I feel quite sure that you have grown, or is it the new style of dress that suits you?"

Violet stood up.

"I have grown, mamma," she answered. "You know I am only just twenty; I may grow taller still."

"You are quite tall enough to be graceful, my dear," said Mrs. Haye, and her eyes lingered proudly on the lovely face with its dainty bloom, so young, so fresh and fair, and on the graceful figure that was shown to such advantage by the costly dress that swept the ground. "You have improved very much, Violet," she added.

In that she was right; Violet had a grace and refinement that gave her an additional charm.

They talked long and not unhappily. Presently Violet produced her presents. Mrs. Haye went into a rapture about a dress of Genoa velvet and some superb Mechlin lace. After that Violet began to inquire about her old friends.

Mrs. Haye had many little facts to relate about all of them.

"Mamma," said Lady Chevenix, with a slight flush on her face, "what do they say in Lilford about my marriage and me?"

"What can they say, my dear? Every one envies you, every one talks about your wonderful marriage."

Violet took up the rich tassels of her dress and played with them. She never raised her eyes to her mother's face.

"But do they—I mean, have they said that I did wrong?"

"Wrong!" cried Mrs. Haye. "Why should they? Which of them would not have done the same thing? Which of them would not be pleased to do the same wrong?"

Lady Chevenix looked relieved.

"I was afraid they would say I had acted unfairly," she said, slowly. "Mamma, how are the Lonsdales? How is Felix?"

There was a brief silence before the question was answered, and then Mrs. Haye told her wonderful story.

"You have never heard of such a change of fortune, Violet," she said; "it is almost as wonderful as your own; I can hardly understand it. The Lonsdales seem to have all the business of the town now, and of the county, too. They have—I cannot tell how many clerks; they give grand dinner-parties; and, what seems to me stranger still, they are frequently invited to Bramber Towers."

"We shall visit there, I suppose," remarked Lady Chevenix. "I am very pleased, indeed, to hear all this, mamma; if any family ever did deserve good fortune they did. They are recognized by the county now, I suppose?"

"Yes, quite. Lady Rolfe has taken them up. I hear nothing but the Lonsdales."

There was silence again for some minutes, and then Violet said, slowly:

"And Felix, mamma—have you seen him since my marriage?"

"No, not once, my dear," was Mrs. Haye's reply. "I need hardly say that he has never been here."

"Do they say—do you know, if he thought much of it? Did he make a great trouble of it, mamma?" she asked.

"I cannot say," replied the cautious mother; "I have never heard the subject mentioned."

Lady Chevenix was silent again. After a while she said, quickly:

"I should like to ask you one question more. Does Felix—has he found any one else to care about yet?"

"I have not heard so. Violet, my dear, you have every blessing the world can give; do not think about him. And, if you will take my advice, you will not talk about him—Sir Owen might not like it."

"I shall be careful, mamma—I shall not speak of him; but I wanted to hear about him just once."

She said no more then, but as she sat in the familiar room she thought a great deal of him—it was impossible to help it. The quick eyes noted how completely every trace of him had been removed; the books that he had given her, the pictures, were all gone.

"They need not have banished everything," she said to herself.

Presently her father awoke; he was delighted beyond measure to see her looking so well and so beautiful.

Later on Sir Owen came, and they spent a pleasant hour together. But there was a dreamy look on the lovely face, a softened light in the clear eyes; she could not help thinking of the past bright girlish life that had been so simply happy. Felix had been part of that life, and she could not help remembering him when she thought of it.

She enjoyed herself, she laughed and talked, she told gay anecdotes of her triumphs in Paris, but, as she quitted the house, she carefully avoided going near the bare lilac bushes, or lingering for a moment at the garden gate. As she drove home she said to herself:

"I do not think I shall go to the Limes very often. After all, the pain is as great as the pleasure."

But she did not own what the pain was.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SIR OWEN'S MOODS.

During the next few days Lady Chevenix was occupied in arranging all the beautiful ornaments, pictures, and statues she had brought with her from abroad. She had her own apartments to arrange; she had to superintend the putting away of the superb garments that she had purchased in Paris, of all the things she had brought with her from her home. Among the treasures of her girlhood was a small rosewood writing-desk. On it she had written all her love-letters; in it she kept every love-letter she had received, and she remembered now that she had not destroyed them before her marriage, and that she ought to have done so. She was alone in the sumptuous room that

was her boudoir—a room hung with blue silk and lace, which had a rich carpet and magnificent furniture of ebony and blue satin; costly pictures lined the walls, rare flowers stood in beautiful *jardinieres.* The apartment was perfect in its way, and the golden-haired girl who stood in it looked like a fitting occupant.

She took out a little key and opened the desk. How well she remembered the perfume of violets—the faint, sweet perfume that she had always liked so much. There lay the great bundle of letters tied with blue ribbon—letters on which a life of love and passion had been wasted; there, too, lay the portrait that Felix had given her when he came home from college—a portrait that had seemed to her one of the finest works of art. She would not open the letters; it would be folly to irritate old wounds. She would burn them; she ought to have burned them before her marriage, but her mind had been in such a whirl then she had not thought of it.

She went to the fire-place and stirred the fire into a bright flame. She had not thought what she was about to do would pain her—it had seemed an easy thing to burn old letters, but when she placed the first bundle in the midst of the flames, it seemed to her that she was burning a living thing. Alas for the love wasted in them, the passion, the pathos! It seemed to her that she was torturing Felix again; the hiss of the flames was like a reproachful voice. Still it must be done. One after another she threw them all in, until the last was destroyed. By that time the color had died from her face, and her hands trembled.

Then she came to the portrait; of course she must destroy it. And what was that folded so carefully in the tissue-paper near it? A spray of lilac, withered and dead. She remembered the day and the hour when it had been gathered. She took the portrait in her hands: there could be no harm in looking at it for the last time. The noble, handsome, frank young face—how she had loved it once. How those eyes had watched her—how those lips had kissed and worshiped her! It must go. She looked at it intently for a few minutes, and then she held it over the flames, but she could not destroy it—she could not see the flames leaping round that face. It was impossible. She wrapped up the portrait quickly, and locked it out of sight.

White and breathless with emotion, her hands trembling, her heart beating, she looked up suddenly as her husband entered the room.

"What are you doing, Violet?" he cried. "Are you ill? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I have seen one," she replied, slowly.

"What have you been burning? The grate is full of burned paper."

She looked at him with wistful eyes. Their expression did not please him.

"I have been burning all the old letters I found in my writing-desk," she replied.

Perhaps she had an idea that he would say something kind to her, but he laughed contemptuously.

"What sentimental simpletons women are! Are you going to keep that shabby little desk here? It spoils the room," he said.

"I thought it quite a grand piece of furniture once," she replied.

"Did you? Your ideas have altered on many subjects, no doubt. I came to ask you to ride out with me."

Her head ached with repressed emotion, but she dared not refuse. She had learned one lesson already, and that was that she must keep her husband in a good humor if possible. Now that the novelty and restraint of her presence were wearing off a little, he was beginning to indulge in fits of temper that startled her. She dressed and went out with him.

"Why do you always select the Oldstone Road?" she asked him.

"Because I like Oldstone far better than Lilford. Most of my property lies in Oldstone. I intend to go to Oldstone Church when I go to church at all, and I shall patronize Oldstone generally."

A painful sense of disappointment stole over her, but she dared not express her feelings. She had pictured herself, in all the pride of her new state, rustling in her costly silk up the old-fashioned aisle of the dear old church at Lilford, to which all her old friends went. She would have liked to see Felix again, to see how he looked and whether he had altered. She wondered what he would think of her in her new grandeur, and felt curious as to where and how they would meet. Then she remembered their terrible parting, and said to herself that she must not think of him.

She never saw him. She went several times to Lilford—more than once she drove past Vale House, but she never saw him. Then Garswood filled with guests, and her time was no longer her own. She ought to have been perfectly happy. She was mistress of the most magnificent home in

the county; she had every luxury that money could purchase; she was *feted*, admired, flattered; she received unwonted homage. The local papers were full of descriptions of the gayeties and amusements going on at Garswood, and gave a list of the fashionable visitors gathered there, and every now and then came some reference to the great beauty of Lady Chevenix. The ladies of the neighborhood, reading this, looked at each other in wonder, as though they would have said, "Can this be the girl we knew as Violet Haye?"

For Lady Chevenix held up her head with the highest among them. She never ignored the past—she spoke of it without hesitation; she talked of her home, the Limes, of her parents, of all her old Lilford friends, with the exception of the Lonsdales, whom she appeared to have quite forgotten. But though she never named them she thought of them, and when she read the brilliant account of all the festivities, she knew that Felix would read the same, that he would hear them talked about. One thing she did wonder at, and that was why he had never contrived to see her. She had imagined that he would make some effort, but he had made none. Christmas came and went; the snowdrops and the crocuses came, the blue violets peeped out, and the desire of her heart was given to Lady Chevenix. She went to London and made her *debut* at court.

Then it seemed to her that she had reached the climax of all happiness and grandeur. Sir Owen possessed a handsome mansion in Belgravia, and the season they spent in town was one long scene of uninterrupted gayety and excitement. Young, surpassingly beautiful, graceful, Lady Chevenix soon won a place for herself in the highest and most exclusive circle. She was idolized; her wealth, her diamonds, her superb mansion, her grand parties, were subjects of public comment. But after a time she found that, although she was liked and flattered, her husband was simply detested. No one seemed to care for him; his manners were so coarse that when she contrasted him with other men of his own rank and position she was ashamed of him; she read intense dislike and aversion to him in the faces of the people whom she liked best and of whom she most approved. Thoughtless, laughing young men said to her:

"Come without your husband, or we shall not enjoy ourselves."

When she particularly pressed any lady to come to see her for some special purpose the answer always was:

"Well, tell me when you will be quite alone, and I will come."

She found that Sir Owen and herself were seldom invited twice to the same place, and it dawned upon her very slowly that she should never be what she aspired to be, a queen of society, because she had a drawback in the shape of her own husband. She was slow in reaching that conclusion, but it was a correct one, and she studied him, to find out, if she could, how it was that he made himself so odious, so disliked.

She could not deny that his face was dark and almost sinister-looking, that his manner and carriage were awkward, that he had an unpleasant voice; the outward appearance of the man was, however, the best part of him. No one could have called him a gentleman; he was selfish and brutal, and so egotistical that in company no person ever had a chance of speaking but himself. He had two moods—he was either familiar and boasted until every man present felt a great desire to put him out of the room, or he was so sullen that to look at him was like looking at a great black cloud. That was Sir Owen in his sober moments, but, as the novel restraint of his young wife's presence wore off, he fell more frequently into his old fatal habit of drinking.

At first he carefully concealed it from her, for in his coarse fashion he loved her. A woman of more noble soul perhaps would have made a better man of him—would have helped him to overcome his bad habits and acquire good ones. The woman who had married him, not for love, but simply for his money, had but one thought—it was to keep him in a good temper while it was feasible, and when it was not to keep out of his way.

CHAPTER XXX.

FACE TO FACE.

The season was over, and Sir Owen and Lady Chevenix were expected at Garswood. By that time Sir Owen, to use his own expression, was himself again; the novelty and restraint of his new life had worn off, all his natural characteristics were in full play, and there were times when his young wife wished herself dead. She was not often driven to such despair, but occasionally he was terrible. As a whole she enjoyed her life. She had money and everything that she wished for; she enjoyed her mag-

nificent home, with all its attendant luxuries; she was by universal consent queen of the county.

For some time there was ill-will between herself and Lady Rolfe. She did not wish to ask either that lady or her daughter Lavinia to Garswood, but after a few words from her husband she was compelled to give way. She had the good sense to make the best of it, and Lady Rolfe became a frequent visitor at Garswood.

During all this time Violet had never once seen Felix. She had heard of him continually—he was rising rapidly in the world. She heard old Colonel Riddell speak of him one evening when she, with Sir Owen, went over to a formal and stately dinner-party at Lady Rolfe's.

"Mark my words," said the colonel, "the leading man in this part of the world is, or very soon will be, young Felix Lonsdale, the lawyer's son. I have watched him with interest. He will be a leader yet. He acts as the earl's agent now, and Lord Arlington has implicit confidence in him. I prophesy that with the earl's interest he will be returned as member for the borough, and that once in Parliament we shall hear of him."

One or two others agreed with the colonel. The face of Lady Chevenix grew crimson when she heard her husband give a little insulting, sneering laugh. She saw with dread that he had drank too much wine.

"I have beaten him once," said Sir Owen, "and I will beat him again; if he goes in for one interest I will go in for the other."

For his wife's sake no one answered him, and Lady Rolfe gave the signal for the ladies to withdraw.

"I shall never go out to dine again if I have to meet that man," said the old colonel, who was an aristocrat *de pur sang*. "Such men ought all to be shot. What could that lovely woman have been thinking of to marry him?"—for the colonel was far above the scandal and gossip of the neighborhood, none of it was ever brought to him.

So there were times in her brilliant, luxurious life when Lady Chevenix was weary of it all, and longed to see the face of a true friend. She had called on Eve Lester, but Eve had declined to see her, and "Aunt Jane" had been rampant on the occasion.

Lady Chevenix sat in the best parlor at the Outlands, looking very lovely, dressed in sheeny silk and marvelous lace, when the elder lady came in to her, more erect and uncompromising than ever.

"My niece declines to see you, Lady Chevenix," she said,

"and I think she is quite right. You jilted our best friend, and, naturally enough, we take his side. Do not call again —Eve does not care to know you."

Perhaps in all her life Lady Chevenix had never felt so humiliated. There was no polite disguise about the remark, no conventional vail. "She had jilted their best friend, and they did not care to know her." Even Evelyn cried out in wonder when she heard what her aunt had said.

"No half truths for me," said that uncompromising lady. "If every one told the truth this would be a different world."

Never had Lady Chevenix felt so humbled; even her magnificent carriage seemed to have grown small and insignificant when she returned to it; while the very servants seemed to know that she had been treated with scorn and contumely. She had hoped to have heard something of Felix from Evelyn, but, if Eve would not see her, why, there was an end of it.

She had not encountered her old lover once. She wished very much to see him. Why should they not be friends? She had no desire for anything more than the most common form of friendship. She remembered his bright, sunny temper, his sweet smile, his wonderful good humor, his cheerful presence. She felt that it would be a comfort and a pleasure to see him at times after the sullen silence that often lasted for days—to hear a few bright words. She found herself often wondering when and where she should meet him again. At last the time came.

Lady Maude Bramber had been absent from home for some few days, and during that time the earl had sent out invitations for a dinner-party. If he and his countess had heard anything of the love-story of Felix and Violet, they had completely forgotten it. The earl sent out the invitations, and one went to Garswood for Sir Owen and Lady Chevenix, and one to Felix Lonsdale. Lord Arlington very seldom had a large dinner-party now without inviting Felix; his brilliant conversational powers made him a most welcome guest.

"Felix is a host in himself," the earl would say, laughingly.

He had not the faintest idea, when he sent out his invitations, of having done wrong. Lady Maude, to whom Felix had revealed his love-story, did not return until the day of the dinner-party, and then it was too late to send a note or message anywhere.

"They must meet some time," she said to herself, in dismay; "perhaps it will be better here than elsewhere. I shall be at hand to help him if he requires help."

She said nothing to any one, but awaited the course of events.

The dinner was given in honor of Lord Rayden, a great statesman, who was visiting the earl, and Lord Arlington was both pleased and proud to introduce his young and gifted *protege* to his friend. Colonel Riddell was invited—he would not have gone had he known that he was to meet Sir Owen, whom he detested—also Lady Rolfe, her daughter Lavinia, and several other friends.

It was a warm day, and the green shade of the foliage all about Bramber Towers was cool and inviting. The dinner hour was fixed for seven.

"There is no keeping people indoors on these fine summer nights," said the earl, "so we may as well be prepared to spend the evening out-of-doors."

Lady Maude only hoped the evening would pass as pleasantly as her father seemed to anticipate. She alone knew what rival interests would be at play. She would have been better pleased had there been time to send a messenger to Felix to tell him who were to be present, but there was not time. She resolved to dress early and wait for him. He should not be seen to disadvantage. She knew that he was coming early; he had some papers that her father wished to see, and they had arranged it so.

Lady Maude was the first in the drawing-room, and, to her great delight, Felix came in soon afterward. She was wonderfully proud of him. As Lady Maude looked at him she thought to herself that there could not be a finer, handsomer, or nobler-looking man in England than he was.

There was a warm friendship between the two. Felix would have done anything in the world for the noble, beautiful woman who had seemed to him like an angel of comfort in the darkest hour of his life; he had the greatest reverence, the greatest esteem for her; he knew that he owed all his good fortune to her kindly influence with the earl. And Lady Maude was very fond of him. She watched his career with pride and hope; she had a feeling almost of proprietorship in him, but for her he might have gone to the bad. So now she waited for him, and, when he had spoken a few words of greeting to her, she said:

"I was waiting for you, Mr. Lonsdale; I have something to tell you. I know you are a brave man; this evening I shall see your bravery put to a severe test."

He could not imagine what she meant, but he said that he hoped whatever might be the test she would not find him wanting.

"I have no fear as to that," she said, earnestly. "Mr. Lonsdale, I want to tell you that Lady Chevenix will be here this evening. Papa made up his list of invitations during my absence, and I could do nothing."

She was glad that they were alone. His face grew white as death—so white that she was alarmed; he stood quite still, and she saw his hands tremble. She talked on that he might have time to recover himself.

"I would have prevented it had it been possible, but it was not. You have never seen her since her marriage, and I am told that she has grown doubly beautiful. Still, if you do not feel equal to meeting her, you shall not."

She saw the great effort that he made to recover himself. He succeeded; the color returned to his face; he stilled the trembling of his hands; he smiled as he answered her:

"You are so good to me, Lady Maude, that I am at a loss how to thank you for giving me this warning. I needed it. If I had met Lady Chevenix suddenly I should have been terribly embarrassed; now I am master of myself."

"And will keep so?" said Lady Maude, earnestly.

"And will keep so," he repeated.

Then the countess joined them, and presently one or two more entered the room.

"Look," said Lady Maude, as she touched Felix's arm gently.

He looked in the direction indicated and beheld Violet, so changed from the lovely laughing girl who had kissed him and quarreled with him twenty times in an hour that he hardly recognized her. This was an imperially beautiful woman, on whose white breast and white arms shone jewels worth a king's ransom—a woman whose face was so peerlessly lovely that it dazzled one as did the light of the sun.

Violet wore one of the triumphs of art that she had brought with her from Paris; and nothing could have been devised to enhance her loveliness more. Her dress was composed of some pale green fabric, soft and shining, covered with clouds of white lace looped up with water-lilies, and in her golden hair nestled a delicate, wax-like camellia. She wore a *parure* of diamonds and emeralds. Her white shoulders and well-molded arms helped to compose a pic-

ture that no man could have seen without feeling his heart beat the quicker for it.

Lord Arlington went forward to meet her. Like a foil to her bright and radiant loveliness, her dark-browed husband stood by her side.

"You are right," said Felix to Lady Maude; "she is a thousand times more beautiful."

Lady Chevenix did not notice Lady Maude Bramber leave his side and go up to her. When she had exchanged a few words with her, she said:

"An old friend of yours, Lady Chevenix, is here this evening." And once more the two who had parted so tragically stood face to face.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MEETING IN THE GARDEN.

Once more Violet and Felix Lonsdale stood face to face. They looked at each other for a moment in silence. To Felix there came back with a keen, bitter pain the memory of his passionate farewell; to Violet there came the sudden, keen conviction that she was looking at the face of the only man she had ever cared for. Lady Maude Arlington, much as she disliked the brilliant young beauty, felt pleased, after bringing the two together, that she had screened Lady Chevenix from observation, for she trembled—her face flushed crimson, and then grew white.

Felix was the first to speak. He did not hold out his hands in greeting; he simply bowed and murmured some few commonplace words.

"I am very pleased to see you," said Lady Chevenix, and the words had a ring of truth that touched both listeners.

With her usual smiling grace Lady Maude said:

"We have a little time to spare—would you like to look at these photographs? They are quite new, and finer than anything I have yet seen."

They sat all three round one of the pretty little tables that were covered with pictures and books. Lady Chevenix turned to Felix again.

"I should like to see your father and Mrs. Lonsdale," she said. "Are they well?"

"They are quite well," he told her, but he made no response to her desire of seeing them.

"He does not care at all about seeing me," she thought;

"he does not seem in the least degree agitated or embarrassed—he has forgotten me," and, as the thought came to her, her eyes filled with tears. "He never could have cared so very much for me," she said to herself; "he could not really have grieved about losing me."

She looked at him—he was talking in a lively and animated strain to Lady Maude. She wondered to herself if this calm, proud, handsome man, so perfectly well-bred, so self-possessed, talking so brilliantly to the earl's daughter—if this could really be the same ardent, despairing young lover who had bidden her a passionate farewell. He was in no hurry to talk to her. She had rather pictured herself as having to hint something like prudence to him; she could have laughed at herself for the notion.

He did not look at her; she doubted even whether he had noted her rich dress, her shining jewels. When she spoke he replied with polite indifference, with well-bred calmness, but he never once voluntarily addressed her. It was all so different from what she had pictured that she experienced a strange sense of depression.

Lady Maude was compelled to leave them for a few minutes, and then Lady Chevenix turned to Felix.

"How strange it seems that we should meet here," she said.

"Yes, it is strange," he replied. "I am very often here on business—you, I presume, come equally often on pleasure?"

"It is my first visit," she said, but he did not ask the reason of that.

"How cold, how indifferent, he is to me!" she remarked to herself. "No one would ever think even that we had been friends. If he would say something reproachful it would be better than this."

But there was no thought of reproach in him. He spoke to her with a smile. He neither sought her nor avoided her. His conduct was such that she might have been a stranger whom he had met for the first time. Then came the signal for dinner, and Lady Chevenix was a little surprised to find that Felix took down Lady Maude. She went down with the earl, and Sir Owen escorted Lavinia Rolfe. Violet was so placed at the table that she could see and hear all that passed.

Never in her life had the beautiful Lady Chevenix felt so surprised. She had always heard Felix spoken of as being clever and gifted, but she had never dreamed that he was really the genius he was. When with her he had sel-

dom spoken of anything but herself and his great love for her. Now, for the first time, she heard him converse with intellectual men, who all seemed to look up to him as their superior. She was astounded. The great statesman, Lord Rayden, talked much to him, and the earl asked his opinion.

"It does me good," said Lord Rayden, "to hear such ideas as yours, they are so thoroughly fresh, clever, and original. We must have you on our side. You must not go over to the enemy."

Felix had a natural wit that made his conversation piquant and amusing. Lord Arlington delighted in it. When any playful attack was made on himself he would look at him and say:

"I shall leave you to answer that, Mr. Lonsdale."

The dinner was a complete success. It was a new thing to Lady Chevenix, intellectual conversation such as she was listening to. She looked once at her husband, and she saw him gazing with undisguised admiration at Felix.

Sir Owen said little. He had ideas of his own; one was that talking at dinner-time was a bore rather than not; people sat down to eat, not to talk. He certainly did not contribute much to the general entertainment. He dined well, and more than once Violet felt something like dismay, as she saw how the wineglasses before him were replenished. She could not help contrasting the two men, nor was she the only one present who did so. Felix was so bright, so handsome, so animated, so gifted and intellectual; he was a leader of conversation even among older and wiser men than himself, for he had the gift of picturesque language. Sir Owen, coarse and heavy, his brain dulled with constant drinking, speaking little, but, when he did speak, saying something almost disagreeable, was doltish and inert, except when he was offensive. There could have been no greater contrast—and Lady Chevenix saw it. To herself she thought how Felix would be appreciated and understood in London, how eagerly he would be sought—who would care to remember that he was the son of a country lawyer? Such men make their own mark. Where her husband would not be tolerated, Felix would be received with open arms.

All these observations she made to herself, as she sat by Lord Arlington, her beautiful face wreathed with smiles. The last words she heard, as the ladies quitted the dining-room, were from Lord Rayden.

"The next time you run up to London, Mr. Lonsdale," he

was saying, "pray come and see me; I shall be delighted if you do, and I will show you the very article in the newspaper of which we are speaking."

And in her own mind Lady Chevenix thought that such a thing as an invitation from the eminent statesman would be an honor Sir Owen would never attain.

The gentlemen did not linger long over their wine. Lord Arlington saw that Sir Owen was inclined to drink freely; he made a note in his own mind that it should be some time at least before that gentleman dined with him again.

As his lordship had foreseen, the outdoor attractions proved too much for the younger guests. The earl himself and Lord Rayden sat down to chess; Lady Arlington, Lady Rolfe, Colonel Riddell, and Sir Owen made up a whist-table; Lavinia went to the piano; Lady Maude distributed her attentions equally, and most of the younger people went out through the long open windows on to the wide terrace.

The evening was fragrant, calm, and sweet; far away under the trees the glow-worms were beginning to shine, a nightingale was singing in the gardens, the faint ripple of fountains filled the air, the rich odor of roses and lilies ascended like a cloud of perfume.

One by one the guests went out. Some descended the terrace-steps into the rose gardens below; some admired the tints in the west left by the sunset, leaning over the stone balustrades; others wandered into the beautiful grounds. Lady Maude walked for a short time with Felix, and then she looked up at him with a smile.

"You can amuse yourself," she said; "you are a man of resource. I must go to that unhappy young lordling who is feebly trying to talk to Miss Lloyd."

She left him, and Felix turned down a broad path where the acacia trees were in full bloom. Lady Chevenix saw him, and followed him. She had been longing for the chance of speaking a few words to him, and it had come at last. He was startled when a shadow fell over his path and a sweet voice said:

"Felix—Mr. Lonsdale—will you be friends with me?"

He turned round in amazement. Violet stood before him, looking as lovely as a vision, her silk dress and rich lace trailing around her, her beauty deepened because over her white neck and shoulders she had thrown a silvery vail; it fell from her golden head, shadowing the fair face.

"I have alarmed you," she said; "you were not thinking of me."

"I am afraid, to use a lawyer's phrase, that is a true indictment," he replied. "Lady Chevenix, I must plead guilty. I was thinking of Lord Rayden."

"And I was thinking of you," she said, gently.

"You are very kind," he returned, indifferently. "Lord Rayden is quite a new type of man to me; I have seen no one like him."

They were walking down the path together now—he had been compelled to follow, as she led. The white acacia blossoms fell on them; the evening breeze was full of sweetness. Lady Chevenix turned to him with her old graceful impetuosity.

"I do not want to talk about Lord Rayden. I do not care to hear about him; I want to hear of you."

"You are very kind," he said again, with a polite bow.

She stamped her little foot on the ground impatiently.

"Do not be so polite to me," she cried, and then she seemed suddenly to remember herself. "I beg your pardon, Felix," she said, "but I want to know if you will be friends with me?"

"I do not understand you, Lady Chevenix," he replied, and she knew there was nothing but indifferent wonder in his voice.

"You do not understand? You must understand. A child would know what I meant. Will you be friends with me?"

She stood still as she asked him the question, and looked up at him with wistful eyes. In the half-golden light her face shone out clear and pure as a star. She held out her hand to him.

"Will you be friends?" she repeated, and this time her lip quivered.

He did not touch the hand she held out to him. He had bidden farewell to those hands—their least touch was no longer for him.

"Do you mean, Lady Chevenix, to ask me if I will be your friend? I do not see that that is possible—you forget the difference in our positions."

"You are Lady Maude's friend," she interrupted.

"Yes, that is natural. I have business relations with Lady Maude's father. It is quite a different matter. There never can be much friendship, I think, between people of different positions."

The tears stood in her eyes.

"I did not think you could have spoken so to me," she said.

"I am unfortunate if I have spoken impolitely or abruptly," he returned. "Friendship is to me a very sacred thing—I never lightly use the word—and I cannot but say that for Lady Chevenix of Garswood and a very hard-working lawyer there can be no common ground."

"I have known you all my life," she said.

He looked at her. He did not speak. It seemed to him that further speech would be imprudent. Her eyes fell before the clear, honest gaze; there was no reproach in it, no upbraiding, but it reached the depths of her soul.

They came to the end of the path; he did not turn back. There was a garden-chair; she sat down upon it, and he passed on with a low bow.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LONSDALES' DECISION.

Lady Chevenix and Felix Lonsdale did not meet again for some time. Sir Owen had not made a very favorable impression at Bramber Towers. The earl had invited him, with his beautiful young wife, to a grand ball, but Felix was not present, and Sir Owen forgot himself so far as to drink too much, and then, when intoxicated, to use coarse language.

In September Sir Owen was invited to be present at a grand political banquet given at Oldstone, and Felix made one of the most telling speeches of the night. It was so eloquent, so magnificent in its true, noble ideas, its picturesque language, that he became popular; a man who could speak so well ought to be in Parliament, the leaders said, and it seemed very probable that at the next election Felix would stand an excellent chance.

Sir Owen was startled; he thought a great deal about "young Lonsdale." With all his own dense stupidity, he was capable of admiring great talent in others. Another thing struck him. During the banquet he sat next to Captain Hill, who told him that he had heard Lord Arlington say that the wisest action of his life was the placing of his affairs in the hands of Darcy and Felix Lonsdale. Sir Owen thought a great deal of that; a good, clever, trustworthy land agent was a person he had long desired above all others, and, if the Lonsdales served Lord Arlington so faithfully they would perhaps serve him in a like manner. He thought over it some days before he mentioned the subject to his wife.

He knew that he was deficient in business capacity. In his sober and most sensible moments he owned that. Study—learning of any kind—had always been irksome to him. He never had read anything but the daily newspapers, and some of the sporting prints; he could not write a letter properly, and he had just sense sufficient to know his own shortcomings.

One morning he received a number of letters that puzzled him—some documents that he could not understand were sent for him to sign.

"A man may sign his whole fortune away without knowing it," he said. "I wish I had some clever man to see to it all for me. Arlington has none of this trouble, I know."

Lady Chevenix, in her graceful morning costume, sat opposite to him. They had just finished breakfast, and that was, as a rule, his most amiable hour. He looked up at his wife suddenly; he had never consulted her on any business before, and would not have done so now but that she knew the Lonsdales.

"Violet," he said, "what a clever man that young Lonsdale is! He is making quite a good position for himself. I should not be surprised to hear of his getting into Parliament."

He did not notice the flush on her face or her agitation. She did not know what answer to make—she dared not say she was glad. Sir Owen did not want an answer. He went on:

"I have been thinking of asking him to be my land-agent; they say he does so well for Arlington. I really cannot grapple with all these matters myself; and he seems to be the only man about here who has a head worth carrying on his shoulders. I wonder if he would undertake it if I asked him, Violet?"

"I cannot tell—I do not know," she replied.

"But you must; surely you have some idea—you have known them a long time. What do you think?"

"I should say the Lonsdales would be very pleased; they ought to be. You would pay them well, of course?"

"I should be quite willing to give five hundred a year, but then I should expect all my work done for that. I pay almost as much as that now in one way or another. I think I shall go and see them about it, Violet."

"It would be the wisest plan," she said.

"Young Lonsdale has not shown any great anxiety to visit us" he continued, with a sneering laugh. "Perhaps

he has not quite forgiven me about you—eh, Violet?—though he did not seem to care about it."

"He has forgotten all that nonsense," said Violet. "I do not believe he remembers even that we were friends."

"So much the better. I shall call to-day and see them. If young Lonsdale consents, I will make him come and dine with us. He dines often enough at Bramber Towers. I hope he will consent. I thought of traveling next year, and I should enjoy my tour much better if I left him in command."

"I hope you will succeed," she replied, and she did hope so; she would have been glad of anything that would have forced Felix into her society. She was lonely in spite of all her grandeur, and there were times when she was dreadfully tired.

It was hard work to live with Sir Owen; she had to watch him incessantly to study his humors, to obey him readily; she had less real liberty than the wife of many a poor peasant. She would be so pleased and so content if she could see Felix sometimes—not that she wanted any allusion even to their former acquaintance, but she never knew what that sweet sunny presence of his had been to her life until it had passed out of it.

If they could meet sometimes, and laugh as they used to laugh over all the little comic scenes and sensations Lilford afforded, if she could talk to him of some of the thoughts and ideas that began to crowd upon her mind and brain, she would be well pleased; there was always a sense of something wanting, something missing, in her life. So she hoped that he would consent to act as Sir Owen's agent. Surely she should see him occasionally.

Her husband was not a pleasant companion, and at times, when her nerves and patience were overtaxed, she would go to her mother with a long list of complaints. But Mrs. Haye was always diplomatic. She would listen with every appearance of sympathy; she would condole with her daughter, and then she would say, "Every wife, my dear, has a great deal to undergo; the foolish ones talk about their trouble, the wise ones keep it to themselves. After all, you must expect some little drawbacks. You have wealth, title, grandeur, diamonds, carriages, servants; the only drawback is your husband, and you must study to bear with him as well as you can."

That was all the comfort that Lady Chevenix ever had from her mother.

Francis Haye would say to her at times:

"I do not like to interfere, Violet; but is all this that I hear about your husband's intemperate habits true?"

"I am afraid so, father," she would reply, and then he would add:

"Can you do nothing to check him? A wife should have some influence over her husband."

"I can do nothing," she would answer, and then her father would doubt whether, after all, things had happened for the best.

* * * * * * * *

Sir Owen rode over to Lilford and called at the office in Castle street. If he had found Felix there, his request would have been refused, but Darcy Lonsdale was in the office, and listened calmly to what the baronet had to say.

"I cannot give you an immediate answer," he replied, "but I will think over your proposition and let you know our decision."

Sir Owen stopped while he said something about his earnest desires, and he made some impression on Darcy Lonsdale by his evident trust in him. Once the elder man was inclined to turn around and say, "You robbed my son of the greatest joy of his life—his love—and I will have nothing to do with you or anything belonging to you." But that would have been undignified, and he had learned his lesson of mercy. To him there was something almost pitiful in the fact of this strong, coarse, rich man, unable to take care of his own, unable to hold his position with dignity, appealing to him for the sensible management that he could not give himself.

He would not decide hastily; he did not think his son would like the business. But five hundred per annum was a consideration, besides which Darcy Lonsdale shrank from the remarks that people would make if he refused such an offer. He said nothing about it until he returned home at night, and then he found Eve Lester there, and the matter was reviewed in solemn council.

"I say take it," urged Kate. "It seems to me really, Darcy, that there is an especial Providence for us. Take it, by all means. It is a sin to throw five hundred a year away."

"My dear Kate, this is more a matter of sentiment than of money," said Mr. Lonsdale.

"I am of Kate's opinion," put in Evelyn. "I quite think you should accept it. If you do not, people will say disagreeable things."

"I have thought of that, too. The general impression would be that Felix held some kind of resentment against Lady Chevenix, or that he had still some lingering liking left for her. What do you say yourself, Felix?"

"My dear father, I will say nothing," he smiled. "It is a matter of utter indifference to me. I do not see that there is the least connection between Lady Chevenix and her husband's agency. Accept or decline it, just as you will."

"If I accept it, I will undertake to do all the work," said Darcy Lonsdale.

"Then I will do more for you, so that you may not feel it," said Felix.

"There would be one thing," remarked Mr. Lonsdale. "If we take the agency we shall be compelled to visit Garswood at times, and I do not know whether you would like that, Felix."

"I shall neither like nor dislike it," he replied. "It is a matter of utter indifference to me. I do not like Sir Owen, I confess; as to Lady Chevenix I say nothing. If we are compelled to visit them we must suffer the penalty of mixing in society."

He spoke in a tone of such perfect freedom and indifference that Darcy Lonsdale said to himself, "He has forgotten her," but Kate and Eve both looked anxiously at him. He looked indifferent, and Kate thought he had achieved the victory, but Eve knew him better, and understood that he would fight to death, but would never yield. So, after a long and animated discussion, it was decided that Darcy Lonsdale should write to Sir Owen and tell him that his offer was accepted.

"I am glad," said Eve, "for I hear many people say that unless matters improve the time will come when Lady Chevenix will badly want some one to look after her interests. Sir Owen drinks dreadfully, and has no thought of the hundreds he lavishes when he is not sober. Poor Lady Chevenix, with all her beauty, may yet want a friend."

"I hope not," said Darcy Lonsdale, kindly. "If I have anything to do with Sir Owen's affairs I shall do my best always for her."

So the matter was settled, and Sir Owen, when he read the note in which Mr. Lonsdale gave his consent, was grateful. He took it at once to his wife.

"They have consented, Violet," he said. "Now from this day henceforth I shall lead a happy life; all that reading

and writing and worry was too much for me. I was tired of it."

She read the note, and laid it down without comment.

"Are you pleased, Violet?" he asked.

"I am pleased if you are," she replied.

She was thinking whether this would bring her and Felix more together.

"I tell you what we'll do, Violet. We will give a grand dinner-party, and you must ask all the people from Bramber Towers, with Mr. and Mrs. Lonsdale and Felix. See about it at once; send the notes out to-day."

She obeyed him without a word.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I WISH I WERE DEAD!"

"We cannot refuse," said Darcy Lonsdale, as he held Sir Owen's invitation open in his hand. "We must go this once, and then we can please ourselves afterward. What do you say, Felix?"

Felix thought for a few minutes, and then he said, frankly:

"To tell you the truth, father, I think I would rather not go—I do not like the idea. To transact Sir Owen's business is all very well, but to dine with him is quite another thing."

"You shall please yourself," returned Mr. Lonsdale.

In his heart, although he had felt great compassion and great indignation concerning his son, he was pleased that he had not married Violet. He had seen no chance of happiness for him—he had resented her conduct to him.

Darcy Lonsdale knew that his son was bitterly wounded, but he said to himself, "Pain is discipline," and every one had some kind of trouble to undergo. So, when he declined to go to Garswood, Darcy sighed to himself, and was sorry that his son still felt the rankling of an old wound.

But Kate would not have it so; for the first time almost in her life she differed from her step-son.

"You must go, Felix," she said. "Only think what people will say if you stay away. Even Lady Chevenix herself will be flattered and think you dare not meet her. Go, Felix; I should not like to give her that triumph. You will have to meet her some time or other—do it now."

He was not quite willing at first, but after a time Kate persuaded him, and it was arranged they should go.

Yet Felix hardly liked it. To have refused Sir Owen's agency would have been to stand in his father's light, to prevent the children from receiving the benefits of an ample income. He would not do that, but when he was in sight of Garswood he hated himself for having come near the place. He could not help wondering how Lady Chevenix would receive him, what she would say to him, whether she would be pleased, or the reverse.

"It can never be pleasant for her to meet me," he thought. "The sight of me must remind her of her unfaithfulness."

As they came in view of the towers and turrets of Garswood he expressed this idea to his father. He wished even then that he could return. He looked anxiously into his father's face.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we have compromised our independence by accepting the agency."

"My dear Felix," Darcy Lonsdale laughed, "if every man were to carry his private feelings into business, business would soon stop. Men come to my office who have slandered me, who helped to raise the cry that I had robbed James Hardman of his rights. I have to forgive them. I do not make friends with them, but I freely forgive them and do business for them; you must do the same. Bear one thing in mind, and you will never be vexed about coming here. You are invited here, not as the lover whom Miss Violet Haye in her innocent pride forsook, but as the agent without whose services and restraining hand Sir Owen, rich as he is, will soon be ruined."

"There is common sense in that view," said Felix.

"Then again for your own sake, Felix, forget the past. The world is very unjust. A woman forsaken is always pitied; a man forsaken is often laughed at. Let people say how little it must have affected you since you can visit her husband—not how bitterly you must grieve after her since you are compelled to decline all invitations."

And with those words the carriage stopped before the great entrance. Father and son entered the superb hall with its ancient oak and armor, its stained glass windows, and an ancient crest emblazond everywhere.

They passed through a broad beautiful corridor where statuary—copies of the great masterpieces of the world—stood, where blooming flowers gave color and fragrance—through magnificent rooms, until they reached the great drawing room where Sir Owen and Lady Chevenix re-

ceived their guests. Several were already assembled, but standing apart from all others Felix saw Lady Chevenix.

It was the first time he had met her in her own home, in the midst of the splendor that was now hers, and his eyes were dazzled by her wondrous beauty. Her dress of white silk with trailing roses was richly trimmed with fringes of gold. She wore a tiara of diamonds set in gold. Her exquisite beauty and her exquisite dress dazed him for a few moments, but he made no sign; and Darcy Lonsdale was proud of his son, as he advanced with princely grace and carriage into the room and bowed to the lovely woman who, despite all her efforts, grew deathly pale as she saw him.

Lord Arlington, who never neglected any opportunity of publicly showing his great affection and regard for Darcy Lonsdale, went up to him and began a long and interesting conversation with him. Lady Maude called Felix to her side. And so the Lonsdales' arrival passed off as the arrival of any other guests would have done.

"I am glad you came," said Lady Maude to Felix. "I was afraid you would refuse, and I should have been sorry for that."

Then dinner was announced, and the long and stately procession moved forward to the dining-room. Felix, from where he sat, could not only see Lady Chevenix, but he could hear all that was passing. He wondered at her perfect grace and elegance. She took her place at that superbly appointed table as though she had been accustomed to it all her life. There was no shyness, no *mauvaise honte*, no *gaucherie* of manner. If she had been the daughter of a duchess she could not have been more well-bred, more refined and graceful. He watched her keenly, and with wonder. Where had she acquired her perfect grace and ease of manner?

Sir Owen, awed by the presence of his distinguished guests, behaved with great propriety, and altogether the dinner was a great success. Lady Chevenix gave the signal to the Countess of Arlington, and the ladies arose. Felix sprang up to open the door for them. His eyes met Violet's, and he saw a red flush cover her face, and rise even to the roots of her hair.

Was she ashamed to parade before him her wealth, her grandeur, her jewels? The more shame she felt the better for her—it was a good sign. The gentlemen had a pleasant half hour, and then they rejoined the ladies.

"Surely," thought Lady Chevenix, "I shall be able to see him, to say a few words to him. I must know if he al-

ways intends to be as he is now, so cold, so proud, so unforgiving."

But it was a far more difficult matter than she had thought. She could not speak to him without attracting observation, unless he either purposely or accidentally found himself near her. Perhaps he would make the opportunity, she thought—but he did not. He talked a great deal to Lord and Lady Arlington, and at times to Lady Maude, but at last came an opportunity. Some one asked for the old-fashioned glee, "When shall we three meet again?" and Lady Chevenix remembered that she had the music. Felix was to take the tenor part—he had a glorious tenor voice, rich, clear, and ringing. She turned to him with a charming smile.

"The music is with some old books of mine in the canterbury—will you help me to find it?" So, while the room was filled with laughter and song, Lady Chevenix and Felix bent over the old music-books to look for the glee. She turned her head, and said, in a low voice:

"I want to speak to you, Felix; will you listen to me for a few minutes?"

"If you wish it," he replied, coldly.

"I do wish it. I want to know if all our lives we are to be like this."

"Like what, Lady Chevenix?" he asked.

"You know what I mean—if our lives are to be so entirely apart, if you will always be cold and distant and proud to me—if you will always avoid me and ignore my presence."

He looked at her in mute wonder.

"Must I remind you of one thing, Lady Chevenix?" he asked.

"What is that?" she said.

"That it was your hand that separated us—that broke all ties."

"Yes, I know that; but could we not be friends? Could you not come to see us sometimes—talk to me, share our amusements, and be really a friend—could you not do this, Felix?"

"No," he said, "I could not."

"Why?" asked the sweet, soft voice.

"Because I happen to be a man, and not a statue—because I have a human heart, and am not made of marble. Our lives lie apart, Lady Chevenix."

"You might be kinder," she said, and the beautiful

woman shrank from him as though he had struck her a blow.

No," he rejoined, "it would not be possible. As the wife of another man, you are nothing to me; to enter into a compact of friendship with you would be to endanger what I hope to keep stainless until I die—my honor before men and Heaven. Our lives lie quite apart, and nothing can bring them into contact."

"Can I help you, Violet?" said a voice near them, and, looking up, Lady Chevenix saw the anxious face of her mother.

Mrs. Haye bent over the music-books.

"I will assist my daughter, Mr. Lonsdale," she said, coldly.

Felix bowed and left them.

"My dear Violet," said Mrs. Haye, "how can you be so imprudent? Why do you talk to him? You will cause remarks that will not please you."

"Mamma," replied Violet, raising her white face, "he says that he will not even be friends with me."

"So much the better, my dear. Lady Chevenix, of Garswood, will choose her friends from among the highest in the land, not from her old playfellows. Try to look like yourself, Violet."

"I will, but I wish I were dead, mamma!"

"Nonsense, child. See, Lady Maude is waiting for you. Come now, my darling Violet—courage; this is but childish nonsense."

So with inspiring words she brought the smiles back to the sweet face, but in her heart she resolved that Lady Chevenix should see but little of Felix Lonsdale while she was there, and she kept her resolve.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MANY CHANGES.

Five years had passed since the peal of Violet Haye's wedding-bells had driven her lover Felix almost mad, since the wonderful turn of good fortune had come to the Lonsdales and made them famous—five years, and they had brought with them many changes. The business and the fair fame of Lonsdale & Son had wonderfully increased; they were compelled to engage more clerks, to enlarge their offices. Times had marvelously changed. Mrs. Lonsdale had a pretty carriage now and no stint of silk dresses; the

children had most of them gone to college and school. The house had been beautifully furnished; there was a general air of prosperity about it that was pleasant.

Darcy Lonsdale seemed to have recovered more than his usual health and strength; he had never been so happy, so prosperous, and contented. Over and over again he said to himself that his misfortune had been a blessing.

He attended almost entirely to Sir Owen's business—Felix very seldom interfered with it, but he in his turn attended entirely to Lord Arlington's. The firm was eminently prosperous, and it was fast taking the place of one of the most eminent in the county.

A great change had come to Felix. These five years had wonderfully improved him. He was looked upon as the rising man of the day; his society was courted; his opinion was sought upon every leading question. He had not arisen, however, without effort on his own part. No one but himself knew how he had worked, how he had studied far into the silent hours of the night, how he had spent in reading the hours that other men give to amusement and recreation. He was like a king among his fellow-townsmen; he had made for himself a reputation far beyond Lilford; he was known as a clever writer, as the author of some of the most brilliant essays and articles published. He retained all the simple habits of his boyhood; he reverenced and loved his father, he loved Kate and the little ones. He might have set up a separate establishment for himself, but he was quite content with the old home at Vale House. The only luxury in which he had indulged was the purchase of a spirited thoroughbred. When he had worked until eye and brain and nerve were exhausted, he would ride through the green lanes, gallop over the breezy commons, and return with renewed vigor.

They asked themselves, those who loved him best, if he had forgotten his unhappy love-affair. It was impossible to say; those who watched him most keenly and most kindly—Eve and Katie—could not tell. They could see that he devoted himself to business and to study, to kindly interest in his home; he seemed to care for nothing else. Had he forgotten the past?

He never mentioned Lady Chevenix; he never made any of those half-bitter, half-cynical remarks in which disappointed men so often indulge. If any one spoke of her in his presence, he listened, and replied if necessary, but there was nothing revealed in his manner. Kate said to herself proudly that he had forgotten her, that his heart

was too noble to keep alive the memory of a woman so false. Eve knew him better. There were times when even a gallop over the breezy uplands did not set him straight, and then he would go over to the Outlands.

"I have come to chat with you, Eve," he would say. "Have you an hour to spare?"

Then one look at his face, at the shadowed eyes, would tell her that he was doing fierce battle with his foe. She would go into the pretty old-fashioned sitting-room, and, making him sit in a comfortable arm-chair, would talk to him. To herself she said often that it was like the laying of an evil spirit. She would read to him, converse with him, give him all the news she could. She knew, and he knew, why he was there, what ailed him, what old sorrow was crying aloud, what vain wild passion, what vain deep regret, was in his heart, but it was not discussed.

She knew when her wise, sweet, tender words took effect; the shadow would fall from his face, and he would listen in silence. At times he would sit for an hour listening, never speaking, and then rising with a brightened look that did her heart good, he would clasp her hand warmly in his own.

"Thank you, Eve," he would say to her; "I know best what you have done for me."

Miss Lester was not very well pleased just then with her niece. Eve had received two good offers of marriage, and had refused them both; and, though Miss Lester disliked men, she had always a keen eye to the main chance, and said that if Eve refused one she ought to have taken the other.

She confided her grievance to Felix.

"I wish," she said, "that you would talk to her; you have known her so long—you are an old friend. Talk to her, Felix; tell her how foolish it is to refuse every good offer."

"But I thought you disapproved of marriage, Miss Lester, and disliked men?"

"So I do—so I do, but I shall not live forever, and Eve must have some one to take care of her. Squire Hethway would have made her a good husband. Talk to her, Felix."

"I really do not like to speak to Eve on such a matter," said Felix; "she might not like it. She must have had her own reasons for saying 'No.'"

"Reasons!" quoth Miss Lester. "She hasn't any. She is waiting until the man in the moon proposes to marry her, and I hope it will be soon."

Felix went away laughing, but he thought of Evelyn

that evening more than he had, ever before. He wondered why she would not marry, and then he said to himself that after all he was not sorry. His friendship for her was the most pleasant part of his life, and he could hardly imagine her devoted entirely to another. She was not beautiful, but there were times when he saw on her fair face loveliness brighter than any physical beauty; she was so tender, so earnest, so pure, so noble and high-minded.

"Whoever marries her," he thought, "will certainly have a treasure of a wife. Eve deserves the truest love that a man can give her."

Yet it never once occurred to him to love her himself. In his honest heart he believed that love was all ended for him; he could not realize that a man could love twice in a life-time. His love, he told himself, had been slain. He never thought now of any future for himself: he never pictured himself with fair wife or loving children; he never dreamed again of a home. He filled his mind with work and study—love had ceased to be for him.

While he steadily rose in the world Sir Owen just as steadily went down. Five years had served to injure both the baronet's character and estate; but for the restraining hand of Darcy Lonsdale he would have been ruined. The clever, honest lawyer had acquired a kind of influence over him; he would not allow him to live above his income; when Sir Owen made most extraordinary demands for money, his answer was always, "If you persist in spending more than your income, Sir Owen, I must resign my office," and that threat invariably brought the baronet to reason. He knew that he was about as capable of managing his estate as of translating Greek.

Sir Owen had had one great disappointment—Heaven had not blessed him with a son and heir. One good quality among a host of bad ones was his love of children. While he was cruel to animals, almost furious at times with his wife and servants, he loved little children; and the chances were that if he had had children around him he would have been a better man. As it was, the disappointment made him sour and morose; he could not bear it; he was sullen and fierce by turns.

"No son to succeed me!" he would say. "Why should I care about my fame or my name? I want a son. I should have something to live for if I had a son. Why, some of the laborers on my estate have half a dozen strong, sturdy sons; why should not one at least have been given to me?"

"You may depend upon it, Sir Owen, Heaven knows best

where to place the little ones," Darcy Lonsdale would say, and then Sir Owen, knowing how far he was from being able to train a child, would say no more.

He would have loved his wife better if little children had been there to soften him; as it was, he now spent half his time in quarreling with her and in tyrannizing over her, and the other half in fierce love-making. That to her was the worst mood of the two.

He was not loved, the rich baronet; the simple townspeople told strange tales of him when gathered around their fires at night—strange evil stories that never came to his wife's ears, or she would have left him.

"I would not have let him marry my daughter," the poor women would say; "no, not if he had been twice as rich."

There was no mistake about the fact that his name was in very evil odor among both rich and poor.

Francis Haye talked over the matter with his wife sometimes. Mrs. Haye looked at it quite philosophically.

"I am told," she said, "that he drinks over a bottle of brandy each day; if that is really the case he cannot live long."

"I do not see how that improves matters," rejoined her husband.

"I do; she is sure to have all his money, and then in a short time she can marry again."

Francis Haye was not particularly sagacious, but this view of the matter struck him at once.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR OWEN'S INSULTS.

Lady Chevenix was standing in her superb drawing-room alone; she held a folded paper in her hand which she was reading attentively; then she meditated for a few minutes, and afterward rang the bell. To the servant who answered it she said:

"Will you ask Mrs. Haye if she can come to me? I wish particularly to speak to her."

Mrs. Haye was spending a few days at Garswood—that was what the world was told; in reality she was there because Lady Chevenix feared for her life. Sir Owen had been drinking heavily, and he had grown dangerous, as she believed. She had lost all control over him, and the terrified servants told each other of sobs and cries that

sounded at night when all the house was still. She grew alarmed at last, and sent for Mrs. Haye.

That philosophical lady said nothing to the fierce, angry man who was beyond reasoning with, but she sent for a physician, and the appearance of a doctor frightened him into better behavior. Lady Chevenix would not part with her mother.

"You must stay with me, mamma," she said. "I have been through scenes that would make you shudder, and I have lost all heart—quite lost all heart. You must stay with me."

Mrs. Haye was one of those women who, even when alone, never undervalue appearances, and she always moved and spoke as though people were looking at her. She merely answered—

"I shall be very pleased, indeed, to stay with you until your husband is stronger and better, my dear."

And it was arranged that she should do so.

Lady Chevenix stood waiting for her now. As she stood there, so tall and stately, with such ineffable beauty and grace in face and figure, she did not look like one who had lost her heart. Her girlish loveliness had developed into womanly magnificence, but there was little trace in her of Violet Haye, the sweet girl coquette—little trace of the girl who had loved Felix Lonsdale, or even of the woman who had asked him so piteously to be "friends" with her. A darker sheen lay on the golden hair, a deeper light lay in the lovely eyes, the red mouth had not its wonted smile. One could see at a glance that the years had embittered her. She had not grown soft and tender, but stern, proud, and cold. She had hardened her heart, and tried to care for nothing but the wealth and luxury she now possessed.

She looked exquisitely beautiful; her morning-dress fell in artistic folds, a tiny cap of white lace and blue ribbon lay lightly on her golden head. Yet, though she was so wonderfully lovely, and was surrounded by all that was most desirable, she did not look like a happy woman.

She raised her eyes as her mother came into the room.

"Mamma," she said, holding out the paper, "I wish you would read this and tell me what to do."

Mrs. Haye took the paper from her daughter's hand and read it.

"The Loomshire Hunt Ball," she said. "Of course you are going?"

"That is what I want to know, mamma. You see, Sir Owen is one of the stewards. If I show it to him, and he

goes, you can guess what is almost sure to happen—he will not keep sober. If I do not show it, and he finds out that I have received it—" A shrug of the beautiful shoulder conveyed the rest. "What do you advise me to do?"

"You must show it to him, my dear; there is no alternative. As steward and patron he must attend—that is, if he is well."

"He ought not to go, mamma. You know what will happen. Doctor Bell advised me to keep him at home and quite quiet, but if he finds out that this has been withheld from him, I can imagine what will follow"

There was no sorrow, no despair in her voice. She merely gave hard, cold utterance to what she knew to be certain. She looked musingly at her mother. Mrs. Haye gazed at her.

"You cannot shut yourself away from all society, Violet, because you are afraid that your husband will not behave himself. You might as well be out of the world."

"Well, as matters stand, that is quite true," she replied. "You do not know, mother, what I suffer when he behaves in that way. I think sometimes that if I had been born an aristocrat I should not feel it so much. Then I could have stood aloof from the disgrace; now it falls upon me."

"Nay, that it does not, Violet," said Mrs. Haye, warmly. "You cannot force Sir Owen to keep sober. He drank before he knew you."

"Yes, that he did. I cannot expect any one to understand me, but that is really my feeling, that I share in the disgrace. Still that is not the point in question. Do you advise me to show him this or not?"

"I think you must show it to him," said Mrs. Haye, "it would not be safe to keep him in ignorance, I am sure, and we must do our best afterward with him. You need not remain very long at the ball, you know."

"I will do as you say, mamma," she replied; and Mrs. Haye could read neither pleasure nor pain in her face.

Left alone again, Violet walked to the window, and stood looking out on the brilliant flowers and the stately trees.

"Of all strange turns," she said to herself, "to think that my life should have taken this—that the brightest part of it is to be spent in keeping a fierce, coarse, violent man sober?"

She was always just. She had sought her own destiny; it had not been forced upon her. She had that which she had coveted, and she must take the drawbacks with it.

She found that she had acted wisely in taking her

mother's advice. One of the first things Sir Owen asked about was the ball.

"Shall you go?" she asked her husband.

"That I shall," he replied, "and you, too. Lady Maude Arlington is going; every one who is any one will be there."

It was a favorite festival of his; he enjoyed making himself popular. He never missed the Hunt Ball.

"Violet, mind you have a dress worth looking at. Lady Chevenix of Garswood must be second to none on this occasion. If there is anything you want, no matter what it costs, you must have it."

She thanked him, but there was neither gratitude nor pleasure in her voice. Bitterly enough she said to herself, "What will it matter if I am covered with diamonds? I shall have a weight of care on my mind which all the diamonds on earth could not balance—the ever-present fear that my husband will disgrace himself."

But during the next few days Sir Owen improved. The doctor had given him a serious fright; he had assured him that unless he led a more abstemious life he must soon die. He bore the warning in mind, and drank less.

He began to interest himself in the ball. Lady Chevenix looked forward to it with pleasure; Lady Maude would be there, and she liked Lady Maude. Felix would be there, too—she had heard Sir Owen say so. She longed to see him again; she felt that there would be a sense of rest and protection in his presence that never came to her with any other. She wondered to herself if he would ask her to dance.

"I should like to dance with him," she thought to herself, with a smile that was almost pitiful.

She took great interest in her dress and her jewels, hoping that he would notice her presence more than he generally did. Very beautiful she looked in her favorite colors, white and blue—white satin and blue velvet. With her exquisitely molded arms and neck—fair as a sculptor's dream—a diamond necklace clasped around her throat, a diamond cross gleaming on her white breast, she looked like one who could sway men's hearts. Sir Owen was proud of her, and said so in his blunt fashion.

"There will not be a woman in the room like you, Violet," he said; and she wondered whether there would be one with such a load of anxiety on her mind.

The ball was always held at the Assembly Rooms in Lilford. It was very exclusive, very select, and at times

very dull. But this year the party from Bramber Towers was a large one; several officers were visiting there. They at first voted the Hunt Ball a decided "bore," but when they saw Lady Chevenix they thought differently. She was worth coming many miles to see, they declared, and she was soon surrounded by a crowd of admirers.

The rooms were beautifully decorated and filled with a brilliant crowd. Lady Chevenix looked for Felix first; she saw him, but he did not approach her. She observed that he chatted with the Countess of Arlington, and then with Lady Maude; she wondered if he would seek her. She kept her would-be partner in suspense. But Felix did not come; he danced with Lady Maude. Violet could not help hearing what people said—"How well they look together! Can it be possible that there is anything in it?" She could not help hearing it, and a pang of jealous pain seemed to rive in her heart. Surely that could never be? Felix marry Lady Maude! It was all nonsense—the gossip of foolish people who did not know what they were saying.

She checked herself abruptly. What if it were so? What did it matter to her? Felix and herself were more than strangers. The greatest stranger in that room thought more of her and said more to her than Felix did. She was the queen of the night. Her wonderful beauty, her gorgeous dress, her costly jewels, made her the very center of observation. She had her triumph. The lover she had forsaken treated her with coldness, her husband kept her in a state of terrible suspense, but the crowd admired her. No one present would have believed that the beautiful, radiant woman had a weight, as of lead, at her heart.

Her spirits rose as the night wore on. It was something to see all the men admiring her; to see them strive for one smile from her; to see how they surrounded her, how they struggled to be of service to her; how her smiles and bright words swayed them as the sweet western wind sways the leaves. That was her triumph, and, to one so vain, it was no small one. She saw that Lady Maude, with all her aristocratic influence, was not sought after and admired as she was.

"Beauty rules the world," she thought, and then added, with a smile and a sigh, "Beauty and money combined, I mean."

Half the evening had passed, and she had exchanged no word with Felix. Presently chance brought them almost side by side in a quadrille. He bowed and spoke to her. She could not help the feeling of relief that came over her.

Would he ask her to dance? She gave him the opportunity, but he did not take it. He never even thought of it. He had taken his farewell of those false hands; he would touch them no more.

When she went to partake of an ice with Major Morrison she saw her husband standing by the buffet. He was holding a tumbler in his hand, and she could tell by his face that he had drank to much. Her heart almost stopped beating. What should she do if there was a scene here?

"Pray excuse me," she said to Major Morrison.

She went up to Sir Owen, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"We have had a very pleasant evening," she said, and her poor lips were white with fear.

"Very," he replied, and in the effort to look dignified he spilled some of the brandy on her dress.

"I am tired," she said, trembling in every nerve; "and, if you will, Sir Owen, I should like to go home."

Her one wish was to get him away before any one noticed his condition.

"I shall not go home yet," he said. "Go back to your dancing. When I am ready I will send for you."

She dared not disobey him. She went back to the ball-room, a deadly fear nestling in her heart.

Whether he ever did send for her, or whether it was but the fancy of an excited brain, Violet never knew. She had not ventured to disobey him when he said, "Go back to your dancing;" she did as he had directed. She had not dared to disobey or to plead with him, or to urge one entreaty on him. She read contempt for her husband and pity for herself in the eyes of Major Morrison. He made no allusion to the scene, nor did she, but when the dance was ended she asked him to take her back to the same spot. When she reached it Sir Owen was gone.

Felix had been to escort Lady Maude to her carriage—the party from Bramber retired early—and as he was returning he saw Sir Owen assisted into his carriage. Sir Owen called to him.

"Mr. Lonsdale," he said, in a thick voice, "will you take a message to Lady Chevenix from me? Tell her that she did not choose to come when I sent for her, and that now she may get home as she can; she may walk through the mud if she likes."

"Stop, Sir Owen!" cried Felix.

But, with great dignity and ferocity mingled, Sir Owen

shouted, "Home!" and the horses started off rapidly, leaving Felix angry and full of wonder.

At first he thought it must be a jest—no one could treat a young wife so barbarously, so cruelly, and he half expected the carriage to return, but it did not, and there was nothing left for him but to make the best of his message. He went back to the ball-room; it was difficult to believe that the beautiful, brilliant young queen around whom the best men in the room had assembled was the wife of the stupid, fierce, drunken baronet. He made his way to her, and waited until he could find an opportunity of speaking to her.

"Lady Chevenix," he said, "I have something I wish to say to you."

She turned eagerly to him, and the light that came over her face caused him keen pain. She arose from her seat, dismissed her train of admirers with a queenly smile and bow, and laid her hand upon his arm. If the touch of the little hand made him tremble she was not aware of it. They walked through the crowded ball-room until they came to a small recess at the end of it; then she raised her face to his.

"You wanted to speak to me," she said. "I shall be very happy to listen."

She decided that he had come to tell her that he would like to be better friends with her; no other thought entered her mind. Her limpid eyes were filled with light as she waited eagerly.

"I am afraid it is not a very agreeable subject," he began. "May I ask if you have seen Sir Owen lately?"

He saw the light and the color fade, the cold, hard look come back again; the very tone of her voice changed.

"I saw him half an hour since, and wanted him to go home with me," she replied.

"Then there has been some mistake—just as I imagined. The truth is, Lady Chevenix, Sir Owen has gone home, after intrusting to me a message so brusque and abrupt that I do not like to deliver it."

Prouder and colder grew the fair face, yet into it there came, he saw, a shadow of fear.

"Gone home," she repeated, "and left me here?"

"I am sure there has been a mistake," he said. "Sir Owen wished me to say that he had sent for you, and—and that as you did not come he had gone home without you."

"But he will send the carriage back for me?" she interrupted.

"I am afraid not," he replied. "But I would rather not repeat his words. I am sure the carriage will not return."

"And he sent me this message by you," she cried—"by you of all men!"

"I am sorry to have had to deliver it, but I had no alternative," he replied. May I advise you, Lady Chevenix?"

"If you please," she replied.

"Then I should counsel you to return home at once, before any one has time to notice Sir Owen's absence—it will save so many unpleasant remarks. I will order a carriage, and no one need know for whom it is intended."

"Thank you," she said, gently, "that will be best. I will go to the cloak-room at once."

She did so, and a few minutes afterward she stood, with her opera-cloak round her, waiting for him.

"The carriage is ready, Lady Chevenix," he said; "allow me." He opened the door for her, and stood waiting until she had taken her seat. "It will not be long before you are home—you have a capital horse and a good driver."

She looked at him, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Felix," she said, "will you accompany me home? I would not ask you but that I am frightened. I am, indeed. I dare not go alone."

He hesitated for half a minute, and then he said to himself that he must not think that she was Violet Haye or Lady Chevenix; she was simply a woman in distress, and it was his duty to help her.

"I am afraid," she continued, and he saw that her face was quite white and that her hands trembled. What a mockery her diamonds and her superb dress appeared now! "Sir Owen is very violent when he is not quite himself," she continued. "If he is at home alone, I dare not go."

"I will accompany you, Lady Chevenix," he said; "have no fear—you may rely upon me."

They said but little during the journey, and Felix was glad when the carriage reached Garswood.

"You will come in with me?" said Lady Chevenix; and, seeing the white, frightened face, he would have done anything to help her.

He was thankful that he had consented, for Sir Owen had worked himself into a state of uncontrollable anger. He was in the drawing-room, with a decanter half full of brandy on the table by his side, and when the pale woman entered he launched a volley of furious oaths at her. She made no reply, but, turning to Felix, said, quietly:

"Will you take any refreshment, Mr. Lonsdale? You have had a long drive."

Another volley of oaths followed. Pale, scared, and trembling, she fled from the room and took refuge in her own. If she had been alone he would have followed her, and then she would have had to save herself as she best could, but Felix was there, and the very thought of his presence comforted her. He staid with the furious man, whose violence soon changed into the extreme of friendliness, until he had stupefied himself with drink and was carried off helpless to bed, and then Felix started for Lilford.

As he left Garswood, Felix raised his face to the calm evening skies.

"Heaven help her," he said. "Poor Violet!"

No reference to this little scene passed his lips, but in his mind he felt infinite pity for her.

A few days later Sir Owen, feeling ashamed of his recent escapade, insisted upon having a dinner-party. Lady Rolfe, that veteran diner-out, with her daughter Lavinia, who had married a curate and subsided into "parish work," the curate himself, a mild, inoffensive gentleman, who had perhaps deserved a better fate, the Reverend Mr. Clayburn, Darcy and Felix Lonsdale, Captain Hill, with one or two more, were to be present. The baronet wished to give this little party to remove any bad impression there might be in the minds of people since the ball. He had resolved upon being most amiable, polite, and attentive, to his wife especially.

But circumstances were against him. His favorite horse that very morning had been found lame, and the groom had the insolence or the courage to tell him that he had caused it himself by his reckless riding. He turned to dismiss the man on the spot, and then suddenly remembered that he could not replace him, for he was one of the most valuable servants that he had. He was obliged to rein in his temper, which in itself was enough to drive him almost mad, so little was he accustomed to self-control. His favorite mastiff, too, was ill, and he was annoyed about that. The veterinary surgeon said that the dog had better be shot, and Sir Owen swore roundly at him, to which the surgeon answered by saying that he could please himself, and that for the future he should not attend at Garswood if he were sent for. Sir Owen was very angry. It was incredible that a baronet worth forty thousand a year could not swear as he liked; such a thing was not to be borne.

So, when the guests sat down to dinner, Sir Owen was

not in the best of humors. He was a discontented man by nature. The first thing that always occurred to him was to complain, to find fault—never to praise. If he saw clear soup he was cross because it was not thick; if it were thick he wanted thin. If one dish were placed before him he was quite sure to complain because it was not another.

On this particular day he was very much annoyed because some of his favorite fish was not cooked as he liked it. In vain Lady Chevenix, seeing a storm brewing, tried to avert it; the more amiable and complacent she looked the blacker and angrier he grew. An uncomfortable silence fell over the guests. Felix did his best; he tried to make conversation, but it was difficult with those muttered growls running on like an under-current. At last some other dish raised Sir Owen's ire, and he exclaimed:

"If I had married some one who understood these things I should have been better off."

The guests saw Lady Chevenix's face grow as pale as the pearls she wore. Her silence irritated her husband, for he cried out angrily against her, with a word so coarse and insulting that there was not a man present who did not long to horsewhip him. She rose with quiet grace and dignity to quit the room; she felt that she owed it to her own self-respect not to remain. No sooner did he see her do so than he sprang from his seat and cried:

"Go back to your seat, my lady—do not show any of your airs here."

The gentlemen arose quickly, but she mastered herself with an effort, for which they commended her. She repressed the hysterical cry that arose to her lips, smiled, and went back to her chair.

"Sir Owen does not always choose his jests wisely," she said, and order was at once restored.

They admired her more than they could say—it was impossible to help it. Her grace, her beauty, her self-possession, her self-contol, her tact, all struck them. There was no one present who did not think highly of her for her behavior through so trying a scene. Sir Owen tried to laugh it off. He made some awkward apologies about having been annoyed by horses, dogs, and servants; nevertheless the incident left two disagreeable reminders for him. Darcy Lonsdale told him that same evening that the next time he insulted Lady Chevenix in his presence he must seek another adviser. Captain Hill did better.

"I want to say a few words to you, Sir Owen," he began when on the point of departure. "You invite gentlemen to

your house," he told him, "and then presume to insult them by behaving in the most brutal fashion to your wife. Do not repeat the experiment, Sir Owen. I have broken bread with you for the last time."

And no further word would the sturdy old sportsman exchange with him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I DESERVE IT ALL."

Sir Owen was alarmed—he found that, although he was a baronet, he could not do as he liked with impunity. Society had certain laws that must be kept—and one was that a man must, if he wished to be considered a gentleman, treat his wife with respect. Sir Owen found that he must alter, for people were beginning to give up his acquaintance; some of the best families in the county, who had formerly welcomed him with open arms, now did not even invite him to their formal parties. He was losing caste as fast as he could lose it, and he said to himself that something must be done; he must alter, or every house in the county would be closed against him.

Withal there was something good in him—he was not without some redeeming qualities. On the day after the discreditable scene in his own house he rode over to Captain Hill's, and asked to see that gentleman. The captain looked very black when he saw who his visitor was, but Sir Owen held out his hand.

"I disgraced myself yesterday, captain," he said, "and I am come to beg your pardon—to say how sorry I am. I deserved every word that you said to me, and now I make you the most ample apology. Will you shake hands?"

It was impossible to refuse, but Captain Hill assented with an ill grace.

"Have you apologized to your wife?" he asked. "That is the chief thing."

"Yes; I have made it all right with her. Upon my word, I am quite ashamed of myself. It shall not happen again."

For some days he did not give way to any excess, and in a shamefaced kind of way he tried to make up to his wife for his recent outburst of violence—he always did when he had offended her almost beyond forgiveness. He lavished new dresses, new jewels, new ornaments of all kinds upon her, for in his heart he loved her better than anything else on earth, though he insulted and ill treated her.

Mrs. Haye had gone home, pleased at leaving matters a little better than she had found them, but Lady Chevenix had vowed to herself that she would not, if possible, be left alone with her husband again. She found that the presence of a third party made some difference, was some restraint, some check upon him. She invited Miss Hethcote to spend a few weeks with her, and that young lady, who had a girl's adoration for the beautiful, graceful Lady Chevenix, gladly consented. Marian Hethcote was a bright, pretty, clever girl, and her companionship was very pleasant to the Lady of Garswood.

They spent the greater part of the time together during the first few days of her stay. Sir Owen was most gracious to her. Then, as was usual with him, familiarity bred contempt. Miss Hethcote herself could not endure him. When her father remonstrated with her one day about her openly expressed dislike of the baronet, she said:

"I could never like a man who swears at his wife, papa, and Sir Owen very seldom speaks to Lady Chevenix without doing so. A man who swears at his wife will do anything."

Her dislike to him was not unjustified. She was sitting one morning with Lady Chevenix in her boudoir, the room that was like a shrine for the woman who used it. They were talking gayly and happily enough, when in the distance they heard the voice of Sir Owen speaking in most angry tones. The sound drew nearer and nearer.

"He is coming here," said Marian Hethcote, and the two ladies looked at each other in distress.

The door was opened with violence, and Sir Owen strode into the room, his face purple with rage. He did not speak to Miss Hethcote, but looked at his wife.

"Where is my silver-mounted riding-whip?" he asked.

"I do not know, Owen," she replied.

"You do know. You had it last, and now it is gone; no one can find it. The grooms say you had it last week."

"I do not remember having had it," she replied, gently.

But the gentle words did not touch him. His temper was, as he expressed it, "all in a blaze," and when that was the case he spared neither man, woman, nor child. Miss Hethcote shrank back, startled and scared at the insults and abuse he lavished upon his wife. Lady Chevenix stood quite calm and still. When the angry oaths had ceased, she looked up at him.

"I will go and try to find it, Owen," she said. "I am sorry if I have annoyed you by misplacing it."

She left the room, and the baronet went to the window. He felt rather ashamed of himself, for in his anger he had quite forgotten Miss Hethcote's presence. He stood there looking out for some minutes in silence. Then he turned to her.

"Women are so stupid," he said.

She was young, and loved Lady Chevenix very dearly, so she was not unwilling to take part in the fray. She had not yet learned that all-important lesson, that it is never safe to interfere between a man and his wife.

"They are remarkably stupid," she replied, "to tolerate such words as you have just used to Lady Chevenix. If I were in her place I know what I should do."

"What would you do?" he asked, sneeringly.

"When I did find the silver-mounted riding-whip, I know what use I should make of it."

He laughed. The idea of a riding-whip in those delicate little hands for the purpose hinted at amused him.

"If you were in Lady Chevenix's place," he said, "you would do just as she does—submit; it is a woman's lot."

"I should not mind submission, but my submission would be to a gentleman, not to a swearing, loud-voiced tyrant."

"You speak pretty freely," he said. "Do not vex me, though."

"I would rather vex than please you."

She was interrupted by the opening of the door. Lady Chevenix entered with the riding-whip in her hand.

"I have found it, Owen," she said, quietly, as though no unkind word had passed his lips. "I am sorry to say that I did mislay it. It was put away by mistake with mine."

"I must request you, for the future," he returned, "not to touch anything belonging to me. What is mine is mine, and not yours. Do not let me be vexed in this way again."

He left the room with a quick, angry bang at the door. Lady Chevenix quietly took up her point-lace and resumed the conversation. Marian Hethcote looked at her, wondering tears in her eyes. She went over to her, and clasped her arms around her neck.

"Dear Lady Chevenix," she said, "is it possible that you do not really care? I thought you would come back broken-hearted."

"Care, my dear, for trifles I am so thoroughly used to?" questioned Sir Owen's wife. "Certainly not."

"I do not understand how you can bear it. It is wonderful to me. I should run away. I could not live under it."

"My dear child, we learn patience as we grow older," said Lady Chevenix, gravely.

But sweet, impulsive Marian would not be satisfied.

"I think it is dreadful. Do not be angry with me, Lady Chevenix, please. I have never heard such words before. They have filled me with horror. I cannot bear to think that you listen to them daily, you who ought to hear only sweet, kind, tender words."

"We will forget all about it, Marian," said Lady Chevenix. "It does not matter; everything comes to an end at last."

But Marian's heart had been stirred.

"Dear Lady Chevenix," she went on, "do not think me rude—that which would be rudeness in another is only love in me. I do love you so dearly, and I cannot bear to hear you spoken to in that fashion. If I were in your place I should run away."

Lady Chevenix smiled.

"That would not be of much use," she said. "I find as the days pass that I cannot run away from my trouble."

Marian stood watching her, with a sad look on her fair young face.

"I often .think about you, Lady Chevenix," she said, "and I wonder why—pray do not be angry with me—you married Sir Owen; you are so gentle, and he is so much the reverse."

"My dear Marian, marriages are made in heaven," she returned, with a slow, sad smile.

"Are they? Well, dear Lady Chevenix—do not think me irreverent—if your marriage was made in heaven mine shall be made on earth. I often wonder if I ever shall marry. Do you know that in my short career I have not seen very much happiness in married life? I am not greatly in love wth it, therefore."

"It is like everything else—a lottery and a chance," said Lady Chevenix.

"I have quite made up my mind what kind of man I should like to marry," went on Marian. "He must be good, to begin with—clever, distinguished, and handsome, gentle, and yet brave—something like—do not laugh at me, Lady Chevenix—something like Mr. Felix Lonsdale; he is my beau-ideal of a man."

She wondered why Lady Chevenix turned away with a little low cry on her pale lpis.

"You like Mr. Felix Lonsdale, then, Marian?" she said, after a time. It was a pleasure to talk of him, to utter his

name and to hear it—a pleasure that she had long been deprived of.

"Yes, I like him better than any gentleman I have met—much better. He seems to me a gentleman in every sense of the word. I like him very much," she continued, warmly, quite unconscious of the pain she was inflicting on Lady Chevenix.

"He would be flattered if he knew how highly you thought of him, Marian."

The sweet, girlish laugh rang out gayly:

"Would he? I do not think so. He does not seem to care very much for the society of ladies; he talks more to Lady Maude Arlington than to any one else. He is not what most people call a lady's man."

"He has other things to think of," said Lady Chevenix.

"Perhaps so. Mrs. Clayburn told me he had a great trouble, a great sorrow, in his early life."

"Did she tell you what it was?" asked Lady Chevenix; and Marian Hethcote did not see the trembling of the white hands.

"Yes; he loved some one who forsook him; she married some one else. Mrs. Clayburn did not tell me much about it, but she said that that accounted for his not caring much for the society of ladies; he had loved this lady so long and so truly that he had taken it deeply to heart, and he had never recovered from the sorrow."

"I do not believe it," said Lady Chevenix, slowly.

"Indeed it is true. I watched him after she had told me, and I saw that whenever his face was in repose it was sad."

Lady Chevenix was quite silent for a few minutes, and then she said:

"Did Mrs. Clayburn tell you who the lady was?"

"No, it is no one near here, I think," answered Miss Hethcote. "She did not say very much, but it was just what I had thought myself. I said to myself the very first night that I saw him, 'That man has had some great sorrow in his life.'"

"I have noticed nothing in him to make me think that," said Lady Chevenix.

"You see so many people that it has escaped you. I am quite sure that he has wasted all the love of his noble life on some one quite undeserving of it. I have an instinct that tells me so."

Lady Chevenix stood up before her, all pale and trembling.

"My dear Marian," she said, "never speak to me of this

again. Some one else will tell you if I do not. It was I whom Felix Lonsdale loved; it was I who gave him up to marry Sir Owen. Hush! Do not cry for me. I deserve it all, and much more; but, Marian, never talk to me of Felix Lonsdale again. We will go now, dear. The bell has rung for luncheon."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MAJOR RAWSON.

"Violet," said Sir Owen to his wife, "I want you to give a garden-party; they are much in vogue. There could be no more beautiful time for one than during this lovely weather. The grounds look superb; we have not a tree that is not in full leaf. Send out your invitations to-day."

"I will do so with pleasure," replied Lady Chevenix, and Marian Hethcote, who was present, appeared delighted.

"You are growing quite amiable, Sir Owen," she said.

"If one garden-party makes me amiable, two ought to make me charming."

"Perhaps they will do so," said Miss Hethcote.

"We will give one now worth remembering. I think I can get the military band from Oldstone—I shall try to do so—and we will send to London for a *chef de cuisine*. We will have everything of the very best."

The invitations were numerous. Lord Arlington decided to accept his.

"I do not like the baronet," he said, "and I am grieved for his young wife; still we cannot send him to Coventry. We must visit him sometimes—and a garden-party is better than a dinner-party. We need not stay so long, and we need not see very much of our host."

So Sir Owen was made happy by a polite note from Bramber, saying that the earl and his wife and daughter would be present at the gathering.

The Lonsdales also promised to be present, and it seemed as though the garden-party was to be a success.

One day Sir Owen sat with Lady Chevenix and Miss Hethcote after dinner discussing the coming event. He turned to his wife.

"Violet," he said, "I saw a very pretty girl the other day—a girl that quite took my fancy. I met her at Darcy Lonsdale's office."

"Indeed!" returned Violet. "Who was it, Owen?"

"Let me see now—what did they call her? Evelyn—Eve

Lester—the niece of a certain strong-minded Miss Lester who lives at the Outlands. You must know her—of course you know her!"

"Yes," was the quiet reply, "I know Eve Lester."

"You ought to like her, too. I quite admire her. I have not seen such a pretty face for some time—yours, of course, excepted, Miss Hethcote," he added, laughingly.

"Lady Chevenix's face excepted, you mean," said Miss Hethcote; "hers, indeed, is a most beautiful face, Sir Owen."

"There is too much of pride and defiance, or rather pride and indifference," he laughed, "in my lady's face. Now this girl Eve Lester is as fair and sweet as a dove; she reminded me of a dove, so fair and gentle is she."

"Very sweet people are apt to be very inane," said Miss Hethcote.

"Inane or not, I wish you would invite her to the party, Violet."

"I will do so with pleasure, but I do not think she will come."

"Why not?" he asked, impatiently.

"Because, though we were friends once, we are not friends now," said Lady Chevenix.

"Then you must be friends, Violet. I am determined to have her at the gathering. I liked her sweet, fair face."

"My dear Owen, I would do anything to oblige you or please you, but I cannot make any overtures of friendship to Eve Lester."

"But I say you must, Violet."

"I am sorry that I cannot. If you are determined that Miss Lester shall come, you must go yourself and invite her."

"It is the usual way if I want anything," he said, angrily. "I can have everything except the one thing most desired. I only wish that I had had the sense to make such a girl as that Lady Chevenix; there would have been no opposition to my wishes then."

"I am quite sure that I wish the same thing," rejoined Violet, quietly.

"Do you? I might have expected such a confession from you," he exclaimed.

All that was disagreeable seemed to be forgotten when the day of the *fete* arrived. The party was likely to be a wonderful success. All the *elite* of the neighborhood had assembled. The sun was bright, the trees were in luxuriant

leaf. Had there been no other attraction the beauty of the grounds alone would have been one.

Sir Owen looked proudly around; it pleased him to see such great and noble persons his guests. The one whom he cared most to honor was Major Rawson, the great Victoria Cross hero of whom all England and even all France had been talking—Major Rawson, who was heir to a baronetcy, and one of the most popular men in England. Sir Owen was very anxious to impress him in every possible way. He was visiting at one of the houses in the neighborhood, and was received by Sir Owen with great *empressement.*

"I do not see Lady Chevenix," said the major; "I am unfortunate in arriving so late."

"We shall find Lady Chevenix somewhere in the grounds," said Sir Owen, and he proudly introduced him to the county magnates.

Suddenly the major touched his arm.

"Who is that beautiful woman yonder?" he asked, in wonder.

"Which?" said Sir Owen.

"The one in blue and white there, talking to that dark, handsome man."

Sir Owen's face brightened with pleasure.

"That is my wife, Lady Chevenix," he said. "Come, and I will introduce you."

"I had heard that Lady Chevenix was beautiful," he replied, "but I had not expected to see such perfection. And the gentleman—who is he? His face is a striking one."

He is my lawyer and agent; his name is Felix Lonsdale. It is strange that on the first occasion of meeting them you should see them together. He was a great admirer of my wife years ago."

Major Rawson was not surprised to hear it; such a woman as that might have any number of admirers.

He looked from the handsome face of the young lawyer to the dark, evil, dissipated countenance of the baronet by his side, and wondered in silence how any woman could have chosen between the two men, and have chosen so badly.

Later on in the afternoon he stood by Lady Maude, and they were both watching Lady Chevenix. The brave soldier who had won his cross by acts of valor worthy of a hero was wonderfully impressed by Lady Chevenix.

"I shall never forget that face," he said, "although I may never see it again. How beautiful it is. And yet there is

a shadow over it. It is not the face of a happy woman, is it, Lady Maude?"

"No, not quite," she replied, hesitatingly.

"Is Lady Chevenix happy?" he asked.

She looked up at him.

"My dear major, what a question to ask me!" she replied. "Who shall say which of us is happy? I think Lady Chevenix loves wealth and position better than anything in the world—and she has both."

"Is it well for us to have our heart's desires?" he asked, gravely. "I have often wondered about that."

"I cannot tell," replied Lady Maude—"I have not mine."

"Nor I," said the major, "but this beautiful lady, you say, has hers?"

He thought Lady Maude singularly reticent on the subject, the fact being that she never liked to hear Lady Chevenix mentioned. She could not forgive her for all she had made Felix suffer; she could not bear to think of so worthy a young fellow having been made wretched through the caprice of a woman. She never liked to remember the day and the hour in which she had found him stricken like one dead by the treachery of a false woman.

She said as little as possible about Lady Chevenix at all times. She was half vexed that Major Rawson should admire her, for, if Lady Maude had in her noble heart one weakness, it was a great admiration for the hero of the Victoria Cross. She would have liked to think that he was above the weakness of admiring a face merely because it was beautiful; she would have felt better pleased if he had praised it for being noble. Lady Maude admired nobility more than beauty, and could not understand any man being a slave to beauty.

She liked Major Rawson, and she said to herself now, in her exalted fashion, that he was the kind of hero she approved of. Her noble face brightened with happiness when he was by her side; she liked to hear him speak; his presence was a source of unwonted pleasure to her. She was too proud and stately to say to herself that she cared for him in any way, though she had a great admiration for him. But the day of the garden-party at Garswood was to be one to be remembered with pleasure by both of them, for it was the day on which they first began to understand that each had conceived a friendship for the other.

The brave and simple-hearted soldier could not comprehend why Lady Chevenix had given up Felix Lousdale for

Sir Owen. Some one gave him an explanation of it, and he came back to ask Lady Maude if it were correct.

"I wish you would not ask me," she said, "for it is a story I do not like to hear or to speak of."

"Your wishes are my law on every subject," replied the major. "If you tell me that I must not ask you I will not, but I am deeply interested, and I do not often interest myself in other persons' affairs."

"I can only tell you what happened," she replied, for to no creature living had Lady Maude ever betrayed one word of the confidence Felix had reposed in her. "The occurrence," she continued, "is unfortunately very common. Lady Chevenix, then Miss Violet Haye—'beautiful Violet Haye,' she was called—was engaged to marry Felix Lonsdale. I believe that if Sir Owen had delayed his coming for three months longer they would have been married. He came, and with his vast wealth and title soon became the lion of this part of the county. How she broke her troth-plight, and why she broke it, what excuses she made to herself or others made for her, I cannot tell you; but it is quite certain that she went to London, and that Sir Owen followed and married her there."

"There can be but one explanation—she must have given up her lover for the baronet," said the major, "but I cannot imagine any woman preferring Sir Owen Chevenix to Felix Lonsdale."

"You forget that Sir Owen had, as the old song says, houses and lands, while Mr. Felix Lonsdale had nothing but his brains."

The major was silent for some minutes, and then he asked:

"Is the world very hard on these sins, Lady Maude?"

"I do not know. I know that society receives Lady Chevenix with open arms."

"And what do women call such sins?" he asked again. "What is the name they go by in this curious world called society?"

"People give them different names—some call them prudence, some faithlessness."

"What do you call such behavior?" he asked.

"Mine is a plain, unfashionable term," said Lady Maude. "I call the woman who breaks her word to her lover a jilt, and I call the wrong she does by its right name of perfidy."

Major Rawson admired the speaker all the more for her frankness.

And so Sir Owen's garden-party passed off well, every

one praising the graceful, beautiful hostess, but no one saw her standing later on in the evening with tears in her eyes watching the sunset.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RECITING POETRY.

Sir Owen had a novel idea—it was, when the June quarter-day came around, to invite the principal tenants to dine at Garswood. Such things were done by the great landed proprietors of the county, and he was desirous of imitating them. This reminded him that there were several other matters that required attention—some of the tenants' leases had fallen in, and to renew them would require a long and patient search in the iron room, where all deeds and documents of value were preserved. There was another important piece of business on hand. One of the farmers in the neighborhood had sold some land to Sir Owen Chevenix, but soon after the sale he died, and his successors disputed his right to sell. Most of the old title-deeds of the Garswood estate required careful perusing, so Sir Owen invited Darcy Lonsdale to stay for a few days at Garswood. It would be much easier, he thought, for him to read all the various papers there than to have them taken to his office.

Mr. Lonsdale thought so, too, and promised to ride over to the Hall, but shortly before the appointed time some important law business called for his presence in London.

"I must go," he said to Felix, "and you will have to take my place at Garswood—no one else can do it. What do you say, Felix? If you dislike it, I will give up my London engagement, but I do not think it can make any difference to you. What do you say?" And the elder man looked anxiously into the face of his son.

Felix was silent for a few minutes, and then he said, with a frank smile:

"It can't matter, father; I go as a man of business, not as a friend. I will do it with pleasure. It would be as well for you just to write and hint to Sir Owen that he might prefer you."

"I do not think he would," returned Darcy Lonsdale; "you are decidedly his favorite, Felix."

Mr. Lonsdale was right. Sir Owen was much pleased at the change. He passed the lawyer's letter to his wife, and she read it.

"I am very pleased," he said. "Felix is cleverer than his father, and I like him. See that he has a nice room, and that his comforts are well attended to."

She made some vague reply—it seemed to her that heaven and earth were about to meet. That Felix should ever be under her roof as her guest seemed to her a most wonderful thing. How should she receive him? Would he soften a little in his manner to her? How fervently she hoped that Sir Owen would treat her, if not kindly, at least with some outward semblance of respect before her old lover. She was glad that Marian Hethcote was still with her—it would have been awkward to have met him alone.

When Sir Owen had quitted the room Marian placed her hands upon Lady Chevenix's shoulders and looked into her face.

"Tell me," she said, "do you like this arrangement? Does it please or vex you?"

Lady Chevenix met her gaze with a calm smile.

"It does neither," she replied, and then Miss Hethcote understood that the subject of Felix Lonsdale was not to be reopened between them.

Lady Chevenix never forgot the evening when Felix came. It seemed to her that everything looked the brighter and the better for his coming. Sir Owen had given orders that the dinner should be delayed until he arrived.

Felix Lonsdale and Lady Chevenix met with seeming indifference. She looked very beautiful; she wore a dinner-dress of white lace, with lilies of the valley in her hair. She held out her hand in greeting to him.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Lonsdale," she said. "I hope you will have a few pleasant days with us."

Miss Hethcote next had something to say to him, and then Sir Owen entered the room. He was most effusive in his greeting. He was delighted to see his guest; he hoped he would make himself quite at home, and enjoy himself as much as possible.

Violet could not help contrasting the two men as they stood for that one moment side by side—Sir Owen's awkward figure and coarse face with the grand beauty of Felix Lonsdale, the nobility of the untitled man with the commonplaceness of the titled one. The contrast was both sharp and strong; she felt it keenly.

Then they went in to dinner. Sir Owen was in one of his best humors, and everything went off well. For so much Lady Chevenix was thankful; every hour spent without an outbreak was a gain to her.

"You will give us this one evening, Mr. Lonsdale," said Sir Owen. "Enjoy yourself a little before you begin to work."

It was a matter of perfect indifference to him. If he had consulted his own inclination he would have preferred to begin work at once, but he could hardly be impolite enough to say so.

Sir Owen liked to sleep after he had dined. Felix declined to take wine, and the baronet, thinking in his heart that the young lawyer was a simpleton for it, went into the drawing-room with him, and then fell asleep. Before he closed his eyes he said:

"Lady Chevenix, Mr. Lonsdale will like to see the grounds, I am sure. You and Miss Hethcote will both enjoy a stroll."

He never once thought that he was submitting his young wife to a most deadly peril—the peril of a great temptation. He never thought of Felix Lonsdale as of one who had been his wife's lover. He had been engaged to her—that was a well-known fact; but, so soon as he, the victorious knight, had appeared, he had retired from the contest defeated, and there was an end of it all. He considered that he had raised his wife so completely above all her past life, that he had taken her so completely out of her old sphere, that nothing which had interested her then could interest her now—he never pondered the fact that Felix Lonsdale, the rising lawyer, the man of promise, the most clever and skillful practitioner in the county, was his wife's old lover. So he lay down in perfect content while he sent his young wife out into the lovely summer gloaming with her old lover.

They walked on, all three together, saying little, but thinking perhaps all the more. They passed through the pleasure grounds; they lingered among the roses and the lily-blooms; they watched the gold fish in the fountain. The air was balmy, sweet, and fragrant with the odor of flowers.

"Let us go on to the park," said Marian Hethcote; "it will be very pleasant there."

They passed through the shrubbery and entered the park. The beautiful fragrant gloaming had set in; the water of the lake was tinged with crimson and gold; a lovely light lay over the trees; there was a faint murmur as the wind swayed the branches of the trees and stirred the leaves. The peace and beauty, the loveliness and repose, touched them.

"Shall we sit down here," said Lady Chevenix, "by the lake side, and watch the light die out over the water?"

They sat down, the two ladies side by side, Felix, nearest to Miss Hethcote, at their feet. Marian was talking gayly to him; Lady Chevenix said but little. He who once loved her with such a passionate love looked at her. No dream of poet or painter could ever have been more fair. The evening light fell upon her face, which was raised to the sky as she watched the crimson clouds; it touched her golden hair and was reflected by the rich jewels that she wore. She had thrown a white lace shawl over her white neck and bare arms; a corner of it was over her head, and the shadow of it softened her features. She listened to the lively sallies of her girl-friend, wondering if she should ever again be so happy, so light of heart.

Then Marian sang a quaint little song—a ballad telling the story of a knight who had ridden away to the Holy Land, leaving a girl-bride who died while he was away—a sweet, sad song, just suited to the hour and the gloaming.

"Now, Lady Chevenix," she said, "you must sing for us, too; sing that beautiful song you were practicing this morning."

"I was not practicing," returned Lady Chevenix. "I was trying to put some words to an air I think very sad and sweet. If you would like to hear it, I will sing it. Would you care to hear it, Mr. Lonsdale?"

He murmured some commonplace words about his having always liked good music. She smiled bitterly to herself, and then, in a low, sad, sweet voice, she sang these words:

"'Yes, dear, our love is slain—
In the cold grave for evermore it lies,
Never to wake again
Or light our sorrow with its starry eyes;
And so regret is vain.

"'We should have seen it shine
Long years beside us. Time and Death might try
To touch that love divine,
Whose strength could ev'ry other stroke defy
Save—only mine!

"'No longing can restore
Our dead again. Vain are the tears we weep;
And vainly we deplore
Our buried love. Its grave lies dark and deep
Between us evermore.'"

Her voice died away in a low, sweet murmur that was like the love-plaint of a bird, and they were silent for some minutes, none caring to break the spell. Then Felix looked at her.

"I remember those words," he said; "they are taken from a poem called 'Lost Alice,' by Adelaide Anne Procter. I gave you the book, I think, Lady Chevenix."

That was the first time he had ever alluded to the past; he had until now always treated her as a stranger—as a lady to whom he had been introduced for the first time by Sir Owen Chevenix.

Her face brightened when she heard it; it seemed to her that the broken chain had been taken up in those simple words.

"Yes, you gave it to me," she acknowledged; "and I know every word of the poem by heart—I have read it so often."

He looked up in surprise.

"Indeed!" he said. "I thought that you did not care for poetry at all, Lady Chevenix."

"I fancied that I did not, but I was mistaken. During these later years I have learned to value and understand many things that were once like so many dead letters to me."

"I wish," said Marian Hethcote, "that we could understand everything at once. As it is, we learn little quickly; it takes long years to teach us the simplest lessons, and by the time they are learned we must die. As my favorite poet says:

> "'We live—we love; and then
> Stone dead we lie.
> O Life, is all thy song
> Endure and die?'

How much more pleasant it would be if we could master everything at once. What mistakes and blunders we make. I read the other day of a great and wise man who, when he came to die, said, 'My life has been all a mistake.' Mr. Lonsdale, I am growing quite sad; it is your turn to sing for us."

"I cannot sing, but I will repeat some verses that I think very beautiful, if you would like to hear them."

"Whose are they?" asked Lady Chevenix.

"They are Miss Procter's," he replied, and he turned his face away from her while he recited them.

It seemed to Lady Chevenix as though the wind fell and

all nature were hushed to listen. There was no passion, no regret, in the low, rich tones—they were clear and sweet and eloquent—but each word as it fell in the fragrant gloaming seemed to burn itself on her heart and brain.

"The poem is called 'Parting,'" said Felix, "and is so beautiful in itself that it cannot fail to please.

"'Without one bitter feeling let us part;
And for the years in which your love has shed
A radiance like a glory round my head
I thank you—yes, I thank you from my heart.

"'I thank you—and no grief is in these tears;
I thank you, not in bitterness, but truth,
For the fair vision that adorned my youth
And glorified so many happy years.

"'Yet how much more I thank you that you tore
At length the vail your hand had woven away,
Which told my idol was a thing of clay,
And false the altar I had knelt before!

"'I thank you that you taught me the stern truth
None other could have told and I believed—
That vain had been my love and I deceived,
And wasted all the purpose of my youth.

"'I thank you that your hand dashed down the shrine
Wherein my idol worship I had paid;
Else had I never known a soul was made
To serve and worship only the Divine.

"'I thank you for a terrible awaking—
And, if reproach seemed hidden in my pain,
And sorrow seemed to cry on your disdain,
Know that my blessing lay in your forsaking.

"'Farewell forever now—in peace we part;
And should an idle vision of my tears
Arise before your soul in after years,
Remember that I thank you from my heart.'"

So clearly, one by one, with cruel distinctness, the words sounded in Violet's ears. She knew, she understood that that was what he would say to her; in his mind there could never be even the faintest renewal of their past friendship, in his heart he thanked her that his unhappy love, his great abiding sorrow, had taught him many noble lessons. She understood—he had said it delicately and kindly, but he had meant it—that the whole past was buried for him; he thanked her that she had taught him to suffer, and suffer in silent strength.

Al. was quite silent for many minutes after he had finished; it was Marian who talked to him and made him recite for them again and again.

The sun had set, the crimson and gold had faded from the water, a gray shade had fallen over it—all was quiet, calm, peaceful. Lady Chevenix rested her head against the gnarled trunk of an old tree; the peace and repose were novel to her. Presently a slight sound in the distance startled her.

"What is that?" she said.

"'It was only the deer that were feeding
In a herd on the clover grass.'"

sang Marian, and Felix looked up with a smile.

"I know that," he said. "You are quoting from a ballad called 'Hush.' Strange to say, I was thinking of it a short time since. The words were running through my brain."

"They have run through my heart," remarked Marian, "often and often. I am matter-of-fact myself, but that song always brings tears to my eyes. Repeat it for us, Mr. Lonsdale."

"I will. There is something in the time that suits the words. The light is dying in the sky, the sun has set, the flowers are sleeping, the wood-pigeons are silent, the air is full of dreams.

"'"I can scarcely hear," she murmured,
"For my heart beats loud and fast;
But surely, in the far, far distance,
I can hear a sound at last?
"It is only the reapers singing
As they carry home their sheaves,
And the evening breeze has risen,
And rustles the dying leaves."

"'"Listen! There are voices talking!"
Calmly still she strove to speak,
Yet her voice grew faint and trembling,
And the red flushed in her cheek.
"It is only the children playing,
Below, now their work is done,
And they laugh that their eyes are dazzled
By the rays of the setting sun."

"'Fainter grew her voice, and weaker,
As with anxious eyes she cried—
"Down the avenue of chestnuts
I can hear a horseman ride!"
"It was only the deer that were feeding
In a herd on the clover grass;

They were startled and fled to the thicket
As they saw the reapers pass."

"'Now the night arose in silence,
Birds lay in their leafy nest,
And the deer couched in the forest,
And the children were at rest.
There was only a sound of weeping
From watchers around a bed—
But rest to the weary spirit,
Peace to the quiet dead.'"

There was silence as the last words fell, and Lady Chevenix bowed her head, so as to hide her tears. The gray shadows fell darker.

A loud voice roused them.

"Where are you? Where have you hidden yourselves? Surely a ramble among the flowers does not mean an encampment by the lake."

Through the clear fragrant air came the odor of a cigar, and Sir Owen, looking very cross, suddenly appeared before them.

"I could not find you anywhere," he said, in a sullen tone. "You must have hidden yourselves on purpose."

Lady Chevenix did not answer him, because she knew that it was needless to do so. Miss Hethcote was equal to the occasion.

"If we had wanted to hide," she said, "we should have hidden. As we did not, we remained here. If you are going to be cross, Sir Owen, do not spoil an agreeable party by joining it."

He laughed then, and sat down with them, but the beauty, the poetry and peace, were all gone. He began to tell of a fight he had seen between a King Charles' spaniel and a toy terrier, laughing heartily at it, and wondering they did not laugh also. It was an exquisite joke to him to tell how the little King Charles lay dying—and even in dying tried to lick his hand.

"Do you enjoy seeing anything suffer, Sir Owen," asked Miss Hethcote.

"I think a dog-fight, or anything of that kind, capital sport," he answered.

"But the unfortunate creatures must feel."

"Feel!" sneered Sir Owen. "What nonsense! Foxes were made to be hunted, rats to be worried, dogs to fight. Why should they feel?"

With a shrug of her shoulders she turned away from

him. Sir Owen laughed again; he rather enjoyed a dispute with a pretty girl.

"I am not one of your sentimentalists," he said. "Now, Mr Lonsdale could give you poems by the yard, I am sure."

"I should be very sorry to do so," remarked Felix; "at the same time I give the preference to poetry rather than to dog-fights."

Sir Owen laughed again; in his own opinion he was a most manly man, and Felix most insignificant. Felix arose from his seat and strolled away; he felt disgust almost amounting to hatred for this coarse, vulgar, repulsive man.

"Do not leave us, Mr. Lonsdale," said Sir Owen. "I will take Miss Hethcote indoors, and you can escort her ladyship—though she looks decidedly sullen."

It was useless for Lady Chevenix to say that she had no thought of being sullen; when Sir Owen had once asserted a thing he maintained it. She looked up into the face of Felix Lonsdale with a smile that made his heart beat faster than usual.

"That is not one of my faults," she said. "I do not remember having ever been sullen in my life; I have seldom been out of temper."

He remembered the sweet sunny temper that had never known cloud or variableness, but offered no remark—he had resolved to himself so often that nothing should induce him to talk to her about the past. They walked toward the house through the deepening shadows, and said but little to each other.

When they reached the Hall Lady Chevenix was grieved to find a telegram from Mrs. Hethcote. Some friends had arrived quite unexpectedly, and she wished Marian to return at once. Felix wondered why the mistress of Garswood should turn so white when she had read the telegram —why she should place her hands upon the girl's shoulder and say to her so sadly:

"What shall I do without you, Marian?"

"I will come back to you as soon as I can, dear Lady Chevenix," replied the girl, "and in the meantime Mr. Lonsdale will be here."

Afterward, when Lady Chevenix had gone to give orders about her journey, Miss Hethcote said, suddenly, to Felix:

"I shall go away much happier for leaving you here."

"I shall be here for a few days only," returned Felix. "Why should you be happy about my being here? I do not understand."

"I may speak freely to you," said Miss Hethcote; "you

know them, and you belong in some measure to them. I may tell you that Lady Chevenix lives in mortal fear of her husband."

"Why?" asked Felix.

"He has been very violent to her many times. It is not long since she had to send for Mrs. Haye, being afraid of losing her life. She has refused to be left alone since then. That is why I have been with her so long, and why I am glad you are here."

"But," said Felix, "he loves her—he must love her."

"I say nothing about that. He may love her, or he may not, but, when he is half mad with drink, she has reason to be alarmed."

"I cannot think that even then he would hurt her," said Felix.

"Well, it is very pleasant to have such cheerful views of things. I should be glad if I could share your faith, but unfortunately I have seen bruises on her arms and marks on her face, such as, if I had been a man, would have made me feel inclined to call Sir Owen out."

She saw the handsome face of the man before her grow pale with emotion. She saw his strong hands tremble and his fingers clench tightly. She talked until the storm of passion had passed over him.

"I cannot bear to think of any woman being ill-used," he said; "it is one of the things that irritates me and makes me angry with an anger that frightens me. But Lady Chevenix is so gentle, so amiable, I cannot understand any man being unkind to her."

"I can understand anything Sir Owen does," rejoined Miss Hethcote. "Mr. Lonsdale, you will be kind to her?" she pleaded. "Believe me that a peasant-woman working in the fields, or a factory girl in a mill, is happier than Lady Chevenix of Garswood."

"I am grieved to hear it'" he said, and then Miss Hethcote left him.

She went away early the next morning, never dreaming of what would happen before she saw Garswood and its mistress again.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BLOW IN THE FACE.

On the morning after Miss Hethcote's departure Sir Owen did not come down to breakfast, but Felix met his valet

with some soda water and brandy. The young lawyer descended to the breakfast-room, where Lady Chevenix awaited him. She looked very fair and young in her pretty morning-dress. She was so pleased to see him; her face brightened, her eyes met his with such a glad light; she could not be cold and formal to him.

"How true you are to your colors, Lady Chevenix!" he said "Blue and white—I hardly remember to have seen you wear anything else."

"You will own that they are pretty colors, will you not?" she asked, with a smile—one of those charming smiles that stir a man's heart and pulse.

He sat down at the breakfast-table with her, and he asked himself had fate ever placed another man in such a predicament before.

"See," she said, "I remember your tastes. You like tea better than coffee, and you like fruit. These strawberries have just been gathered; they have the dew on them."

She talked to him during breakfast, so gayly, so kindly, but, when he looked at her, there was something almost pathetic in her eyes—something that in spite of her brilliant beauty, was half sad. Then, when they had finished breakfast, a servant came in to say that Sir Owen would join them in a few minutes, and would take Mr. Lonsdale to the strong-room.

The long French windows were open, and great heavy red roses came peeping in. Lady Chevenix went to them; Felix followed her, and they stood talking together. In some vague way the years seemed to have fallen from them, the terrible past for a few moments was forgotten. He was like the Felix of old, she like beautiful Violet Haye. They had just a few happy minutes, during which they spoke only of the roses before them and the pleasant prospect. Then Sir Owen came in, and it was as though the whole face of the heavens had changed.

The baronet and his legal adviser went away together, and Felix spent the whole of the day in the strong-room, reading documents and papers of all kinds. He did not see Sir Owen and his wife again until dinner, and thus the first day of his visit passed quietly enough.

On the second the tenants came to dine at the Hall, and the grand banqueting-room in the western wing was thrown open. The dinner passed off well, and the tenants drank Sir Owen's health with noisy cheers. Nor were they much less enthusiastic about Felix, when his health was proposed.

After a pleasant day they left Garswood early in the evening.

Lady Chevenix had been alone all day; the servants were in attendance on the numerous guests, and in the evening she asked for tea, thinking that Sir Owen and Felix would like to join her. Sir Owen, who had drank more brandy in a few hours than another man would have drank in a week, made some observation about her ladyship's tea, which, when repeated by the footman in the servants' hall, caused great amusement. Felix was sorry to decline, but he had some hours of hard work yet in the strong-room; the leases were all to be signed on the morrow.

When the visitors were all gone he returned to the strong-room and resumed his work. Lady Chevenix went to him to persuade him to let her send some tea there, and he consented. He looked at her, as she stood in that darkened room, in her evening dress of white silk and trailing lace. She wore a superb suite of opals, which shone with the "fire that lives in gems." She looked like a dream of beauty in that dull, gloomy room.

She sent him some tea, and asked him to come to the drawing-room when he had finished, and he promised to do so. When she returned Sir Owen lay on one of the couches, fast asleep.

She was thankful to see him asleep, and hoped that he might wake up quite himself. She drew down the blinds and darkened the room. Who could tell what she suffered in her heart, this fair, stately woman, who shrank so keenly from all stigma of disgrace, her daily, hourly dread lest her husband should do something that would entail everlasting shame upon them, lest any one should see him in those moments when he was quite unfit to be seen? What a double life she led, this brilliant and beautiful woman—before the world all gayety, smiles, and animation, in her own heart always a terrible weight of anxiety.

For this evening at least she was safe. She thought he would wake up himself, and then they would spend a happy hour with Felix, so she watched lest sound or light should disturb him until Mr. Lonsdale joined them.

He awoke at last, but the sun had long set, and the fragrant silence of night lay over the earth. She had cooling fruit that was pleasant to eye and taste ready for him, she had everything that was refreshing, but no stimulant. He pushed aside the purple grapes and the crimson strawberries.

"Where is the brandy?" he asked her. "The idea of

offering a man such things as those," he exclaimed. "Ring for the brandy!"

She dared not refuse—moreover, refusal would have been of no use. She rang the bell and gave the message, but, before the brandy came, with sweet, womanly tact, she had lured him from the room, hoping that he would forget it. She walked through the long corridors for some minutes, talking to him, then he suddenly remembered Felix, and said nothing would satisfy him unless he left his work and joined them. He went to persuade him, while Lady Chevenix ordered the lamps in the drawing-room to be lighted.

The two gentlemen returned together, and they played for some time at cribbage, a game for which Sir Owen had a great liking. Suddenly he remembered the brandy, and asked for it. Lady Chevenix dreaded its coming; she said the evening was warm, and begged of him to take some iced tea instead. He laughed at her.

"Listen to her ladyship!" he cried. "Iced tea! The very name of it makes me shudder. I want brandy—nothing else."

She remonstrated again, but very mildly. She felt that she could bear anything better than this, that the man she had forsaken should see in his true colors the man she had married.

Those last words proved too much for Sir Owen. He swore roundly at her. What business of hers was it, he asked, if he wanted a sea of brandy. Let her remember herself—remember from what position he had taken her, and not attempt to dictate to him; he would not endure it. She tried to soothe and conciliate him; she might as well have tried to soothe a panther.

The brandy was brought, but even then he did not recover his good humor. Felix was miserable. He longed to put down his cards and say good-night, but he saw the face of Lady Chevenix growing white, and he was afraid to leave her. Miss Hethcote had told him of Sir Owen's violence. He would not leave her to the mercy of that violent man, yet every moment he remained with them was a torture to him. Sir Owen had no moderation. In vain his wife and Felix engaged him with cards and in conversation. Despite everything he filled and replenished his tumbler. At length the alcohol began to take such an effect upon him that Lady Chevenix deemed it prudent to rise.

"It is growing late," she said; "we had better put aside the cards."

"Yes," agreed Felix; "I am tired."

He had no time to finish his speech. Sir Owen did not seem to hear it. He merely turned with a scowl to his wife, and cried, in a voice of thunder:

"Sit down, and go on with the game."

Felix saw that she trembled in every limb, yet she kept all sign of emotion from her face; nothing but its pallor betrayed her fear. She sat down, but the young lawyer's spirit was roused. He threw the cards upon the table.

"Lady Chevenix is very amiable to go on playing," he said; "I shall not. It is late, and quite time to leave off."

Without a word, and so suddenly that there was no time to prevent it, Sir Owen turned and struck his wife in the face.

"Take that," he said, "and mind you do not interfere with me again!"

The next moment a pair of strong arms had seized him and had literally thrown him across the room. His face white, his whole body trembling with passion, Felix stood over him.

"If you touch her ladyship again, if you lay your cowardly hands upon her," he cried, "I will kill you!"

Then he turned to Violet. She stood trembling, with a great red mark across her lovely pale face—a mark that burned like a hot iron.

"Oh, Lady Chevenix," he said, "I am so sorry! I ought to have been quicker, more on my guard. Are you much hurt?"

She raised her face with that terrible bruise on it to his, and he saw great tears in her eyes. For a moment the old impulse of love was strong upon him, and he longed to shelter the golden head, every hair of which was dear to him, on his breast; then he recollected himself, and said, gently:

"I shall never forgive myself that this has happened. If I had been quicker—" He broke off abruptly, for his wrath was rising again. "I shall kill him," he cried, "if he touches you!"

She looked up at him; the bruised face touched his heart, and he turned away. Sir Owen was lying just where he had thrown him. He went over to him; the baronet had most composedly fallen asleep.

"Thank Heaven," he said, "that I did not kill him—that I did not do him some deadly harm. Shall I ring for the servants?" he asked Lady Chevenix, and he never forgot her answer.

"If you would not mind it," she said, "I should be so thankful if you would place him in a chair; I do not like the servants to see all that happens."

He raised Sir Owen, who made some violent plunges the while, and placed him in a chair. The baronet fell placidly asleep again, and Felix went back to Lady Chevenix.

"You must apply something to your face," he said, "or it will be black to-morrow."

She smiled and raised the white lace that fell over her arm. He saw a long dark bruise, the mark of a cruel grasp that had held the delicate arm in an iron vise.

"I am seldom without a mark," she told him, "but I do not often find them on my face."

He looked sorrowfully at the graceful woman who had preferred money to love, and had suffered so terribly for her choice; he longed to say something kind to her, but prudence forbade him. She held out her hand to him, and he saw how it trembled. She smiled, and he never forgot the smile.

"Some day," she said, "he will most probably kill me. If he does you will always remember that I—I was sorry I had grieved you, Felix."

"I will remember," he returned, gravely. He held her hand for one moment while he bade her good night, and then she went away.

CHAPTER XL.

FEAR AND ANXIETY.

Felix thought long and anxiously about his return from Garswood. He was glad that he had treated Sir Owen as he did; he said to himself that he should have been less than a man had he not acted as he did. Yet it was not likely that after what had passed he could remain under Sir Owen's roof; neither did he desire to do so. It was torture to him to see Violet ill-treated; he could not bear it—nor could he interfere to prevent it.

Moreover, he believed it to be quite impossible that after the *fracas* Sir Owen could continue his business relations with himself and his father; a man might forgive much, but knocking a person down was a serious matter. So, when the sunshine came peeping into his room, Felix had quite made up his mind that that would be his last day at the Hall.

His ideas were confirmed when a servant, tapping at his

door, said that Sir Owen would be glad to see Mr. Lonsdale in his own room. That, he believed, was the prelude to his dismissal.

"Never mind," said Felix to himself; "if I were placed in such circumstances again I should do just the same, and perhaps more."

He went immediately to the baronet's room. As he passed from one room to another he could not help admiring the magnificence and luxury of the house; it was simply superb, and the morning sun shining through the windows, made it more beautiful still. He little guessed what that same sun would see before it set.

He entered Sir Owen's room quite anticipating, and indeed half hoping for his dismissal, but his heart was touched when he saw the trembling figure before him. Sir Owen, flushed and excited with drink, was bad enough; Sir Owen, in the morning light, trembling, weak, and haggard, was worse. Felix quietly awaited the beginning of the storm, but, to his surprise, Sir Owen held out his hand. The young lawyer would not see it; he felt that he could never touch a hand that had been raised against a woman.

"I am really very sorry, Lonsdale," Sir Owen began. "I am afraid I was too much excited over the tenants' dinner, and forgot myself. I am very sorry. I hope that I was not offensive to you?"

"He has forgotten what happened," thought Felix to himself. "I must tell him."

"You were not offensive to me, Sir Owen," he said, "but you behaved with the greatest brutality to Lady Chevenix. You struck her with such violence that I was compelled to interfere."

There was something ruefully comic about the baronet's face.

"I ought to be much obliged to you, I am sure," he said. "I love my wife very much, and cannot understand how I could have so forgotten myself. But I am very unfortunate when I exceed my usual allowance of wine, Lonsdale. You will shake hands and be friends?"

"I am willing to forget my share in the business, Sir Owen. But excuse my shaking hands with you."

The baronet laughed uneasily.

"You are very particular," he said, and then turned the conversation.

Felix, despite his disgust, felt a great pity for him; it was not lessened when he saw his valet come to him with a bottle and a glass.

"Take less of that, Sir Owen," he said, "or you will kill yourself."

"Well, I have to die, and I may just as well die taking what I like as taking medicine. Some men have more to live for than I have. I am very fond of my wife, but she does not care much about me, and I have no child. I really believe, Lonsdale, that I should be quite a different man if I had a child."

"You have plenty to live for, Sir Owen. You have your duty to do on earth, yet more, you must think of a future life," said Felix.

"I can pay other men to do my duty, and, as to a future life—well, I have not been able to decide about that yet."

"It is high time you did so," said Felix, gravely, and Sir Owen laughed.

"I have no thought of dying yet, Lonsdale; indeed, I dare not die if all that the parsons say is true. Let us talk about something more sensible. Are you going to work again to-day?"

"The work has to be done, and I suppose I must do it. The leases have to be signed this morning."

"I will sign them before I go," said Sir Owen. "I am going out this morning, because I do not feel like myself. I am out of spirits; a cloud is hanging over me. I shall have a good gallop, and see if I cannot clear away the heaviness."

Felix went to his work, which on this morning was in the library, and before he had been there very long Lady Chevenix entered.

"I did not know that you were here," she said. "Shall I be in the way? I have some letters to write."

He placed a chair for her, and then looked at her face. Across the soft cheek was the mark of a violent blow.

"It is not very painful," she said.

Presently Sir Owen came in to sign the papers. He seemed very much ashamed of himself when he saw the bruise on his wife's face. He took her to the great oriel window, and they stood there for some time talking; then Lady Chevenix came back to her place, and Sir Owen went out of the room.

Violet and Felix went on writing in silence, when there came a tap at the door. Sir Owen's groom wanted to know if he might speak to her ladyship for a few minutes.

Lady Chevenix bade him come in. The man stood before her, cap in hand.

"My lady," he said, "I beg your pardon; I must make

bold enough to ask you to interfere. Sir Owen he will go out riding this morning. That is all good and fair, my lady, but he will ride the new hunter Plantagenet, and he is no more fit for it than a child."

"You had better tell him so, Martin," returned Lady Chevenix.

"My lady, I have told him, over and over again. The more I tell him the more he will go."

Lady Chevenix looked helplessly at Felix.

"Mr. Lonsdale," she said, "will you go and try to persuade Sir Owen not to ride that horse? It is a highly mettled animal, and he has never ridden it yet."

Martin touched his forehead to Felix.

"If you could persuade the master to stay at home this morning, you would do him a service, sir," he said. "Indeed, my lady," he continued, turning to Lady Chevenix, "Sir Owen could hardly manage Bonnie Bess this morning, his hands are so shaky."

"Thank you, Martin," she responded; "it was very thoughtful of you to come to me. Mr. Lonsdale will follow you."

When the groom had retired she went up to Felix and laid her hand upon his arm.

"I know that you will do your best for me," she said, pleadingly.

"You may be sure that I will," returned Felix, and then he went away.

He might as well have appealed to a rock. All that he said, Sir Owen laughed to scorn.

"Something happen to me?" he cried. "Yes, I know what it will be. I shall come home cured of the 'blues.' I am going to gallop dull care away, and Plantagenet shall help me."

Felix looked attentively at the horse.

"I was never afraid of a horse yet," he said, "but I would not ride that one."

Lady Chevenix, finding that Felix did not return, came to see how matters were progressing. She gave a little cry of alarm when she saw the great powerful hunter, and her husband preparing to mount him.

"Owen," she cried, "my dear, do not attempt it. Pray, pray do not."

He felt rather flattered by her evident anxiety, and ouched her face with his lips.

"Good-by, Violet. Do not make a scene. I have said

that I will ride Plantagenet, and I mean to do so; nothing on earth shall prevent me."

She cried aloud in her distress. Felix interposed.

"I should enjoy a gallop this fine morning, Sir Owen," he said. "Shall I go with you?"

"As my head-nurse, eh, Lonsdale? No, thank you. I can take care of myself very well, indeed."

For more than half an hour the three—the true friend, the anxious wife, and the faithful servant—reasoned in vain. They could never reproach themselves in after days that they had not done their best, but their words were as vain as the beating of tiny wavelets against a sturdy rock. Sir Owen would ride Plantagenet, and there was an end of it. The only compromise that Lady Chevenix could effect was that he should take the groom with him.

"If it will please you, Violet," he said, "I will do so." He thought himself very good-natured in giving way so far.

She liked to remember afterward that she went up to him and said:

"Owen, I would do anything in the world for you, if you would give up this mad idea—anything! Do please me this once."

He kissed her, and then got into the saddle.

"I shall be back to dinner all right," he told her. "I may be rather late, for I shall ride around by Parkerly Copse."

"Martin," said Lady Chevenix to the groom, "do not leave your master for one moment. Do what you can."

"I will, my lady," he replied, "but I misdoubt me it will end badly."

With a heavy heart Lady Chevenix re-entered the house, and Felix went back to his writing. Violet retired to her own room, to while the time away with a book.

The sunny hours of the beautiful day wore on; no cloud came over the smiling heavens; yet there was a faint wail in the summer wind which to the weather-wise heralded a storm. The shadows lengthened, and Felix had not left the library; he had partaken of a biscuit and a glass of sherry there, as he was anxious to get his work done. He had completely finished by six o'clock, and on going in search of Sir Owen was told that he had not yet returned. Lady Chevenix was in her room. He would have been glad if he could have gone home then; he did not care to remain for the long formal dinner and the long formal evening. Still he was unwilling to leave Lady Chevenix until her husband returned.

The first bell rang, and he went to his room. Sir Owen,

he was told, had not returned, and her ladyship seemed anxious about him. After a little while Felix went into the drawing-room, where Lady Chevenix sat, dressed for dinner, looking superbly beautiful in a dinner dress of blue velvet and a suite of pearls. She turned to him anxiously.

"Sir Owen has not returned," she said. "I have told them to keep back the dinner until he comes."

He saw that she was terribly anxious, and did his best to cheer her. He went to the balcony, where roses and jessamine grew in wild profusion.

"Come and look at these flowers, Lady Chevenix," he said. "I read a beautiful legend about the jessamine the other day." And while she stood by his side he related it to her.

The anxious look fell from her face, and her eyes lost their strained, intent expression. He thought, if he could keep her attention engaged until Sir Owen returned, how well it would be—how much pain it would spare her. She turned to him suddenly:

"Do you think anything can have happened?" she asked. "Ought I to send servants out to look for Sir Owen?"

"Martin is with him,' said Felix.

He left her for a few minutes, under the pretext of finding something that he had missed. In reality he gave directions for four of the men-servants to mount at once, and ride off in search of their master, and then he returned to Lady Chevenix.

"I am growing terribly frightened, Felix," she said.

In this hour of supreme anxiety all barriers seemed to have fallen between them. She forgot that he was the man she had forsaken and deceived. She thought of him only as one in whom she put infinite trust—in whom she had infinite faith. He was once more the Felix on whom she had relied from her childhood upward.

"I do not think you need be alarmed, Lady Chevenix, and for this reason—Martin is with him. If anything had happened to Sir Owen the groom would have hastened back; of that you may be quite sure."

The thought was reassuring, and Lady Chevenix was relieved.

CHAPTER XLI.

"WEAKER THAN A WOMAN."

Seven o'clock struck, and then half-past, and Felix persuaded Lady Chevenix to take some dinner. If anything had happened, he thought to himself, she would be better able to meet it after dining. She was very unwilling at first, but after a time she consented, and dinner was served.

"I know what I think myself," said Felix. "Sir Owen has called in somewhere, and they have persuaded him to stay. Try to imagine that; it seems to me not unreasonable."

They sat alone at the stately dining-table, where the silver plate and the richly cut glass looked so brilliant—the table where Lady Chevenix had undergone so many humiliations. It was but a farce; neither of them could eat.

Eight o'clock chimed, and no other sound broke the summer silence.

"I cannot sit here any longer doing nothing," said Lady Chevenix. "I am quite sure now that something has happened; I must send out a few of the servants."

"I have done that," Felix told her. "All that is possible has been done; they will return together soon."

His words were prophetically true. Even as he spoke they heard a confused noise at the grand entrance-hall—the rush of many feet, the cries of women, and the deep voices of men.

Felix never forgot Violet. She arose from her seat, and stood hesitating for one moment pale as death. Then she turned to the door. But Felix was before her. That which was happening in the hall was most assuredly something which she must not see.

"Sit down, Lady Chevenix," he said. "You must not go out there. Let me see what is wrong."

She did not seem to understand him, but he placed her in a chair, and then opened the door. There was a rush of terrified servants, and women's voices cried, "Oh, my lady—oh, my lady!"

He held up his hand with an imperative gesture.

"You will kill Lady Chevenix," he said, "with this noise. Let no one go near her."

He took one step forward, and at once saw the cause of the commotion. A crowd of men stood round a litter, and on the litter lay Sir Owen. Felix pushed them aside.

"Is he dead?" he asked, and the answer was, "No."

"Thank Heaven for that!" he cried. Then he uttered a little cry of dismay, for Lady Chevenix stood by his side.

"What has happened?" she said. "Tell me the worst."

"Sir Owen has been thrown from his horse; and Martin says the horse fell on him," cried a dozen voices.

And then, his eyes dim with tears, his whole frame trembling with excitement, Martin forced his way through the group, and stood before Lady Chevenix and Felix.

"My lady," he said, "I wish I had been dead before this day came around. You sent me to take care of him, and he is brought home so."

"Tell Lady Chevenix how it happened," directed Felix, hastily.

"Sir Owen rode nearly all the time, my lady, and I rode by his side. We went all round Lilford, Harberly, and Ripdale. He stopped at Ripdale, and took some refreshment. Then he came home by the woods, and the horse was all right until Sir Owen came to the ring fence. The church clock at Lilford had chimed half-past seven. He turned to me and said, 'Martin, I shall take that fence in fine style.' I begged him not; I prayed him not. I told him the fence was too high for any horse, even the best in the kingdom, to take. But he would not listen—you know, my lady, he never would listen. He put the horse at the fence, and it refused. He whipped it and spurred it until my blood ran cold, and then he put it at the fence again. But Plantagenet would not take it. A third time he used the whip and spur, until the horse went almost mad. A third time he went at the fence. The horse tried his best, but his fore-feet caught the top, and he fell over, master being underneath him, my lady. When I went to raise him, I was afraid he had been crushed into a shapeless mass, but he was not, nor was he killed, for I felt his heart beating. I had a flask of brandy in my pocket, and I put it to his lips—he could not swallow it. I had to leave him there while I galloped off to the nearest cottage and gave the alarm. Then we made a litter, and brought him home."

Felix turned to him.

"How long will it take you," he said, "to ride to Lilford, and bring back two doctors?"

"I can do it in two hours and a half," replied Martin.

"Go at once," said Felix, "and lose no time. You, John, go to Ordstone Station, and send a telegram to Sir William Daly, the great London physician. The address is Hyde Park Gardens. Say what has happened, and ask him to come at once. You, Stephen, go for Mrs. Haye. Take the carriage, so that she can return at once. Horton, if you will help me, we will carry Sir Owen to his room."

Felix sent for Mrs. Wardley, the housekeeper, and when she appeared he begged of Lady Chevenix to leave them for a time. She was very unwilling to do so.

"I ought to be with him, Felix," she said. "I ought, indeed."

"So you shall be when I think it is right to send for you," he answered, and she went away.

They carried the baronet into a spacious, handsomely furnished bedroom. The curtains were drawn and the lamps lighted. They laid him on the bed of down, and the faithful servants wept over him.

"I always knew that it would be so," said Mrs. Wardley. "I have always expected this evil day. I was his mother's nurse, sir," she added, speaking to Felix, "and I nursed him until he was three years old. He never would listen—never—and it has come at last."

The men took off his clothes, and placed him between the fine linen sheets. Felix examined him attentively; he could discover no bruise, no wound. But for the pallor of his face he might have been asleep.

"I begin to hope, Horton," he said to the butler, "that there is not much the matter. I cannot see a wound. He is stunned with the fall."

But Horton shook his white head.

"I am afraid, sir, that it is more than that. What time is it now?"

Felix took out his watch.

"It is just a quarter past nine," he replied.

"It will take two hours and a half to bring the doctors here; that will make it a quarter to twelve. My lady might come in, sir. There is nothing to frighten her."

Then Lady Chevenix did come in. Felix looked hopefully at her.

"I begin to have every hope," he said; "there is not much the matter, I think. Certainly there are neither broken limbs nor bruises. I am of opinion that Sir Owen has been stunned by the fall. We will bathe his head, and try to get some brandy between his lips. I do not think there is very much the matter."

Lady Chevenix went up to her husband, and knelt down by his side. She had never professed any love for him, but, as he lay there, white, silent, and helpless, a keen sense of pity and compassion for him awoke in her heart. She took his hands in her own, and rubbed them.

"Owen," she said—"my dear, try to speak to me."

They brought brandy; Felix gave it to him himself with a spoon, and this time they were quite sure he swallowed it. Felix looked at Violet.

"He has swallowed it," he said; "and see—there is some color coming back to his lips. Lady Chevenix, speak to him again."

"Owen," she said—"my dear, can you speak to me?" And this time there was no mistake; one of his eyelids moved, and his lips trembled faintly.

"He is getting better!" she cried. "I can see his lips move!"

They redoubled their efforts, and presently the pale lips parted. Felix gave him a little more brandy. They left nothing undone that they could do, the four who stood so anxiously by him—his wife, Felix, the butler, and Mrs. Wardley. At last the baronet gave a deep sigh and opened his eyes. His wife bent over him.

"Are you better, Owen?" she asked, gently.

He looked up at her.

"Better?" he repeated. "I am all right."

"Tell me what is the matter?"

"I had a nasty fall. I remember it now," said Sir Owen. "It stunned me. I do not remember how I came home though."

They told him, and he listened attentively.

"So Plantagenet fell on me," he said. "I wonder that he did not kill me. As it is, I am not hurt. I am stunned—dazed a little. Very likely I fell upon my head, but it is wonderful that I am not hurt."

"I am very thankful," put in Lady Chevenix. "It might have been so much worse."

"Yes, it might. I own now that my conduct was very foolish. Violet, you will give all those poor fellows who helped to bring me home a handsome reward, will you not? Lonsdale, I am glad that you are with me. You will stay, will you not?" I shall be all right to-morrow."

They asked him if he had any pain. He said "No." There was a strange giddiness in his head, and a strange sensation of numbness in his body, but, save for that, he felt all right.

The old butler, when he heard that, turned and quitted the room. He felt sure as to what was coming.

Sir Owen lay perfectly still. The lamps were all lighted, and their clear, brilliant light fell on the compassionate face of Felix Lonsdale, and on the troubled one of Sir Owen's wife.

"How bright and pleasant everything looks!" said the baronet. "How strange it seems to be lying here! I shall get up to-morrow." Yet, when he tried to move, there was a sense of helplessness that he could not understand. "It is strange," he said to Felix, "that I have neither wound nor bruise. I was quite stunned, but that is all. This numbness will go away with a few hours' rest. I am so glad you are here, Lonsdale. You will not leave me to-night, will you? I feel strangely wakeful, and it is dreadful to lie awake through the long hours of night."

"Of course I will stay," he replied, "and Lady Chevenix, too."

"How strange it was, Lonsdale, that you and I should have been talking about death this morning! It must have been a foreboding of my accident. I have had a wonderful escape. I shall never forget it. I cannot think how it was that brute did not kill me. Violet, come nearer to me, and let me hold your hand. What a strange sensation it is to be frightened at nothing, as I am."

She came nearer to him, and took his hands in hers; he looked at her.

"I have had a narrow escape," he said again, with a shuddering cry—"a narrow escape. Violet, this will do what no lecturing and no sermon could do. It will make me a better man. I will be a better man, my dear—I will, indeed. I will give up brandy, and I will be kinder to you; I will, Violet. I will look after things better than I have done. I will help the poor, and go to church."

There was a brief silence, and then he started suddenly.

"I was asleep," he said—"asleep and dreaming. How strange! I shall be better to-morrow. I wish this feeling of numbness would go. It is nothing, but it is uncomfortable—I cannot stir. I shall be a better man after this, Violet. We shall be happier than we have ever been yet. I wish to-morrow were come, that I might get up. Felix, you need not send for any doctors; I shall not want any. My head is dizzy; it will soon be all right."

"They sent for doctors as soon as you were carried home," remarked Lady Chevenix.

"They need not see me if they come," he said. "You can

tell them I have no pain, no wound, no bruise. I do not like doctors, and I shall be all right to-morrow."

Ten o'clock and eleven o'clock struck. He talked to them the whole time; but at eleven he complained more of the terrible numbness and the inability to move.

"I lie here like a log," he said. "I shall be glad when to-morrow comes." He looked haggard and restless as the time wore on. "I will not ask for brandy," he remarked, "though I should like some; but I mean to give it up—I do, indeed. You will see, Violet, how happy we shall be when I am well."

It was nearly midnight when the doctors came—Doctor Brown, the old established practitioner, and Doctor Brene, the clever young physician from London, who had bought a practice in Lilford. They looked in wonder at the scene—the superb room, the pale, lovely woman in her dress of blue velvet and pearls, the man lying on the bed.

Felix explained rapidly what had happened.

"I am all right," said Sir Owen. "They need not have troubled you, gentlemen. I have no pain, no bruise, no wound. The fall stunned me—that is all."

The doctors looked at each other, and then asked Lady Chevenix if she would leave them with her husband.

"There is no need," he said, impatiently. "Lonsdale, never mind what they say; do not go."

"I will not be long away," replied Felix.

He did not like the look that had passed between the doctors; it was not a hopeful one. He touched Lady Chevenix gently on the arm.

"Let us retire for a few minutes," he said, and, kissing her husband's face, Violet rose and quitted the room.

They did not go far. Through the oriel window at the end of the corridor the summer moon was shining, and they both walked thither. She looked up at Felix, and he saw that she trembled.

"I am frightened," she said. "It seems so strange."

In perfect silence they stood at the window, watching the moonlight on the gardens. They had been there quite twenty minutes when the door of Sir Owen's room was slowly opened, and Doctor Brene came to them.

"I have bad news for you," he said, in his grave, full voice. "Lady Chevenix, you must be brave. I have very bad news."

She could grow no paler. She stood white, calm, and self-possessed before him, but her heart was beating painfully, and every nerve was strained to the utmost.

"You must promise to listen quietly to what I have to say. Tell me first whether Sir Owen has any worldly affairs to settle."

Lady Chevenix looked at Felix, as though she hardly understood.

"He cannot have much to do," he said. "His will was made and signed some months since."

She seemed to understand neither question nor answer. She looked at the doctor.

"What is it?" she asked. "I do not understand. Tell me about my husband."

"He is very ill, Lady Chevenix—very ill, indeed."

"But," she cried, "he has no pain—he has no wound!"

"So much the worse. Any pain would be better than none. The truth is—now promise me to be calm, Lady Chevenix—the truth is that Sir Owen has injured his spine, and that there is no chance for his life."

She trembled so much that the doctor brought a chair and placed her in it. He asked Felix to get her some wine.

"Try," he said, "to bear up for a few hours. Your husband cannot live longer, and you must be with him. You must comfort him to the last. Try to bear up."

"I will," she replied "My poor Owen! And he does not know?"

"No. He knows nothing of it yet," he answered. "Drink this wine, and come back to him. It is midnight now, and he cannot live until sunrise. Come at once Lady Chevenix; you must tell him, if you can, that he has to die.

"I cannot," she said. "I know it is my place—my duty—but I cannot do it. In some things I am weaker than a woman; this is one of them."

"Then I must tell him myself," returned the doctor, as he moved away slowly, "but that is not as it should be."

"Felix," she said, "I have never seen any one die. I know nothing of death. I am terrified at the thought of it. Do help me."

"I will," he answered—"all that I can."

They went back to the room, and Sir Owen looked up as they entered.

"Why did you let me be tortured with doctors?" he cried. "I was getting better quickly, and they have frightened me with their long faces. They say—oh, listen, Violet—they say that I am going to die!"

He uttered the last word with a scream they never forgot.

"It is all nonsense," he continued. "My back is hurt with the fall—that is all; it is nothing more—nothing

more, I assure you. Lonsdale, send for your father. I want to see him; he has always been kind to me, in his way. He will see at once there is nothing the matter; send for him."

Felix left the room at once, and sent Martin off for his father. He asked if the carriage had returned with Mrs. Haye, and was told that it had not. He went back to the room, and found Violet kneeling by her husband's side. Her head, with the golden hair all unfastened, was on the pillow, and she was trying to reason with him.

CHAPTER XLII.

THIRTY THOUSAND A YEAR.

At one o'clock in the morning Darcy Lonsdale reached Garswood. He had no words in which to express his surprise and dismay on hearing of Sir Owen's accident. He had returned home on the previous evening from London, and a few hours afterward received the summons to Garswood. He went direct to Sir Owen's room, and was startled by the loud cry with which the dying man received him.

"Come here, Darcy," said Sir Owen. "You have more sense than all the doctors put together. Do I look like a dying man?"

"You look better than I expected to find you," answered Mr. Lonsdale.

"Yet they say I am dying. They say my spine is injured. I am talking to you now, yet they say when the sun rises I shall be dead. It is absurd—say it is absurd, Lonsdale."

Mr. Lonsdale looked down with infinite pity on the face that was almost convulsed with terror.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you have heard the truth. It would be cruel to give you one false hope. It is time for you to make your peace with Heaven."

Sir Owen turned his agonized face to his wife.

"Oh, Violet, they are all against me, my dear, but you. You do not believe it, do you? You are kinder, and you care more for me. What is my life to them? Tell me—do you believe that I am going to die?"

She whispered her answer. No one heard it but himself, and with a wild cry he turned away his face.

"They are all alike. They want me to die. They will not let me live." he exclaimed.

Doctor Brown stopped his wild raving by telling him that the quieter he was the longer he would live. The

presence of the two doctors, however, irritated Sir Owen so greatly that they were compelled to go down stairs. Felix followed them. The night had grown cold and chill. A storm was brewing; the wind was wailing round the house, bending the tall trees, and robbing them of leaves.

The servants were all up, and a fire had been lighted in the library. Felix ordered hot coffee, and sent some to his father and Lady Chevenix.

"This is a terrbile state of things," said one doctor to the other. "There seems to be no sense of what should be done. We ought to send for the vicar."

"Yes, it would be better," agreed the other. "It would save appearances. But I am no believer myself in death-bed conversions."

"You forget," rejoined his friend, "that mercy may be extended even at the last moment."

"No; I do not forget that. But I think the best preparation for death is a good life. I would not change places with Sir Owen."

Felix sent at once for the Vicar of Lilford, and then returned to the baronet's room, leaving the doctors together.

Sir Owen had grown very quiet now. He lay with Violet's hands clasped in his, as though, clinging to her, he could not die. Darcy Lonsdale sat at the other side, his kind, sensible face full of compassion. He had seen nothing in all his life that affected him as this death-bed scene did.

The dying man looked up as Felix entered the room, and, taking one hand from Violet, held it out to him.

"I am no worse," he said, but the voice was changed and faint. "Have you sent the doctors home?"

Felix bent over him without replying, and there was such kindly sorrow and anxiety in his face that Sir Owen said:

"You are a good friend—what I call a true friend. My dealing with you was not fair as regards Violet here. But you forgive me?"

"Yes," answered Felix, "I forgive you."

"Now look at me," whispered the faint voice—look well at me. I feel weak, but that is through lying here so long, and being frightened. Tell me, do I seem like a dying man?"

With a woman's weakness Felix bent lower over the face that a few hours since had seemed to him repulsive, so that Sir Owen should not see the tears which filled his eyes.

"Do not be angry with me," he said. "I dare not say 'No.'"

The baronet groaned; and shortly afterward Mrs. Haye arrived from Lilford. Lady Chevenix never moved; she still knelt by her husband's side, and Darcy Lonsdale kept his station opposite. Sir Owen smiled when Mrs. Haye came in—he had always liked her.

"Did they send for you also?" he said. "What folly! You must not believe one word they say."

The darkness of the night passed—there was a faint gleam of early dawn in the eastern sky. The dying man's quick ears detected the first notes of the birds.

"Hush! Hark!" he cried. "The birds are chirping! Now who is right? They said that I should be dead before the dawn! Draw those hangings, Violet, and put out the lamps. It is dawn now; I see the red light in the sky. I am right, and the doctors are wrong."

They drew the hangings and put out the lamps, and the dawn came flushing into the room. The great window faced the east, so that the first rays of the sun shone directly into the room. How gray and haggard Sir Owen's face looked as those beams touched it!

Darcy Lonsdale discerned what Violet could not—the speedy coming of death. He knelt down by the dying man's side, and he spoke to him as no one would have thought he could speak. He dwelt so much upon the mercy of Heaven and the goodness of God that Sir Owen's pale lips trembled.

"I wish," he said, "that I had thought of all that before. It is too late now—much too late."

The vicar came, but when he stood by the baronet's death-bed it was perceptible to all that Sir Owen neither heard nor understood. He roused himself soon afterward, however.

"I feel very ill, Violet," he said—"very ill, indeed. I have no strength; I cannot move. Can it be true what they said? Call the doctors back, and tell them they must do something for me."

They were brought back, and such an hour passed then as they hoped never to see again. Sir Owen's terrible cries, his screams of fear—for he was afraid to die—horribly afraid of the unknown future—distressed them. It was such a scene that those present were long in forgetting it. Then, when the bright sun came forth in his splendor, and the birds chirped loudly, the baronet turned his face to his wife, sighed softly, and his spirit fled.

He had been dead some minutes before the doctors found it out, and the same sunbeams gilded the dead face of the husband and the white beautiful living face of the wife.

They carried her away, for the horror of the scene proved too much for her. She was so overwhelmed as to cause alarm among those who loved her. It was bright morning then. The doctors took some breakfast, and each went off to his duties. Lady Chevenix lay in her room, with Mrs. Haye keeping anxious watch by her. Felix went home and Darcy Lonsdale remained, to take charge of every thing.

The gloom of the next few days was great. Into the darkened house there came no sunlight. People kept going and coming, all intent on the same melancholy business—preparations for the funeral. Dull gloomy days they were, into which came no gleam of hope.

Sir Owen's death caused great dismay; still no one was very much surprised at his untimely end; and, curiously enough, the suddenness of it excited great pity. People who had spoken unkindly of him, and condemned his faults most vigorously, now grieved most for him. His sins and errors seemed to be covered by the great dark, thick vail of death.

The day of his funeral came, and half the county attended. Sir Owen was buried in the church-yard at Lilford, where the oak trees seemed to murmur among themselves that they had foreseen what would happen, in the early days, when he walked under the spreading shade of their great branches.

Then came the reading of the will. The lawyers and trustees assembled in the library, and Lady Chevenix, in her widow's dress, entered soon afterward, accompanied by Mrs. Haye. There was some little commotion at her entrance. One gentleman brought a chair, another a foot-stool. She looked so delicately lovely in her widow's dress, her golden hair half hidden by a pretty Parisian cap, the heavy folds of rich crape sweeping the ground. Lord Arlington hastened to meet her, and, after a few kindly words, took his station by her side. It was well known that he and Captain Hill were the two executors of the will. He spoke some few words to her in a low voice, and then both composed themselves to listen.

It was a good and just will—evidently the product of a thoughtful mind. Mr. Lonsdale had, in fact, suggested almost every clause in it. Every old servant in the house had a handsome legacy; the trustees all Sir Owen's old

friends—every one was remembered. The bulk of his fortune, with Garswood, was left to his "dearly beloved wife." There was a very handsome bequest to Francis Haye, and one to the vicar; there was a large sum left to each charity in the neighborhood.

There was a murmur when the reading ceased. Every one was pleased. Lady Chevenix bowed as she quitted the room, and the gentlemen stood in little groups to talk about her.

"What a fate!" said Lord Arlington. "So young and so beautiful! She will have an income of over thirty thousand pounds per annum, too. What a strange fate!"

"That comes of having a beautiful face," put in frank Captain Hill. "A beautiful face is better than a fortune."

"At times," said Darcy Lonsdale. "Every beautiful woman is not favored like Lady Chevenix."

Then matters pertaining to the estate were discussed by the executors, and it was arranged that, with the young widow's consent, all business should still be left in the hands of Mr. Lonsdale.

A very different scene was passing in the room where Lady Chevenix sat with her mother. Mrs. Haye was walking up and down, her pride and elation almost more than she could conceal.

"I always liked Sir Owen, my dear. I always said that he was a most honorable man. What could be nobler than his treatment of you? I have known such terrible things happen."

"What kind of things, mamma?" asked the widow, but there was little interest in the tone of her voice.

"Terrible things, my dear. I have heard of rich men dying, and leaving a handsome fortune to their wives on condition that they never married again. Now I call that most atrociously mean."

"So it is, mamma," said Lady Chevenix, "and very wrong, too."

She spoke, however, as one whose thoughts were not with her words. She had untied the widow's cap, and was caressing with her fingers the long golden hair that fell over her shoulders. Mrs. Haye did not observe her.

"Sir Owen, you see, Violet, had more sense than that. I have never heard of a more generous will. Only twenty-six, and you do not look twenty, young, beautiful, with a fortune like that—what more could any woman desire?"

"I desire no more, mamma. I only feel as though I

wanted a long rest. I am very tired; no one can tell how tired I am."

"Your income will be over thirty thousand a year. Only think of that. And it was so good of your dear husband to leave your father and myself five thousand pounds; it showed such a kind feeling. It seems strange that so much good fortune should have fallen to your lot."

The young widow looked around her sumptuous room.

"Yes," she said, "it seems strange to remember that I was once Violet Haye."

"'Beautiful Violet Haye,' all the young farmers called you," rejoined Mrs. Haye. Then she saw the golden hair lying on the folds of crape. An expression of horror came over her face. "My dear Violet, how can you be so careless," she cried, "and after such a will as that? Put on your cap, my dear child, at once. Only imagine my feelings if one of the servants saw you. I should never forgive myself."

"I did not think of what I was doing," said Lady Chevenix, languidly.

"But you must think of such things. You must study appearances. It is a duty."

Mrs. Haye hastened to her daughter's side, and with her own hands wound the golden hair into a large knot, and placed the cap securely on her head.

"Do not take it off again, Violet," she said; "after such a will it seems quite heartless."

She wondered why her daughter laughed with a tired, hopeless expression—she who was mistress of thirty thousand a year.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"WHAT IS IT?"

Long months had passed since Sir Owen was laid in his grave, and now August was come round again, with its ripe fruits and yellow corn. Lady Chevenix, every one agreed, was a model widow. During the interval that had elapsed since her husband's death, hardly any one had seen her. Visitors had called, but had never been admitted; they had left cards and condolences, and had each approved of the fact that Lady Chevenix kept herself quite secluded.

Mrs. Haye spent a great deal of time with her daughter. It was, indeed, that most estimable lady who had advised

the long course of seclusion—who saw that the golden head was not uncovered until the proper time—who brought to her daughter all the news of the outer world, and formed the one link between her and society in general.

Nothing could have been more decorous or proper, and every one felt it to be quite the right thing to speak of Lady Chevenix as feeling her husband's loss so keenly that she was no longer able to see any one.

Did she feel it so keenly? She never asked herself the question. She had been overwhelmed with the horror of the closing scene—as indeed had every one else who had witnessed it. It had haunted her sleeping and waking hours, as it had the days and nights of every other witness. She had been stunned and bewildered by it. She had been so frightened that all her natural high spirits had left her. Did she regret Sir Owen very much? She could not tell—she never asked herself the question. She had been shocked, startled, horrified—but it was not the keen sorrow of her loss that made her shrink from all observation. It was rather the reaction from what she had suffered. And she suffered still. She often started in alarm from her seat, her heart beating with terror, thinking that she heard her husband's voice; then she remembered that he was dead. She woke often from her sleep, her pillow wet with tears, her whole frame trembling with the horror of some terrible dream, in which her husband was an active figure—and then she remembered with a strange emotion that he was dead.

It was strange to go about the house without fear; it was strange to give her orders with certainty that they would be obeyed; it was strange to know that she need tremble and suffer no more. There were to be no more anxious hours spent in waiting for her husband to go out and come in; it was all over—he was dead. She said the words to herself a hundred times each day—"Sir Owen is dead." She had found it difficult to realize her subservience; she found it just as difficult to realize her independence. She told herself at times that she was absolute mistress of Garswood—absolute mistress of thirty thousand a year; but she could neither realize nor understand it.

One day Lord Arlington found it necessary to see Lady Chevenix on businsss; he was accompanied by Captain Hill. She received them with quiet grace, and listened with intelligence to all their business statements; then she

said it was her express wish that Darcy Lonsdale should continue to act in every way for her, but as he would have more to do, she insisted on doubling the salary Sir Owen had paid him. Lord Arlington was very pleased about it, and the interview ended satisfactorily.

Meanwhile Darcy Lonsdale spent whole days at Garswood, and it was strange that he never once mentioned Felix to Lady Chevenix—nor did she inquire about him. But one day, when some protracted business was coming to an end, she looked up suddenly, and said:

"Your son was very kind to me in my distress, Mr. Lonsdale. I can never forget how kind he was. But for him I do not know what I should have done."

"I am sure that he would be pleased to be of service to you, Lady Chevenix," he replied.

"It was doubly kind of him. He heaped coals of fire on my head," she declared, warmly. After a few minutes she added, "I should like very much to make him a present, Mr. Lonsdale—just as a slight acknowledgment of his kindness to me. I should like to present him with a diamond ring. I thought I would consult you first. What do you think of it?"

She saw Darcy Lonsdale's face flush. He did not answer for a few minutes; then he replied:

"I will speak to you quite frankly, Lady Chevenix. I do not think that he would like it."

She bowed to him.

"I am glad that I asked you," she replied. "You know best."

"I am quite sure that the fact of his having been of service to you will be far more to him than any diamond ring, or anything that could be given to him," said Darcy Lonsdale.

"How is your son?" she asked. "Is he well? He never comes here."

"He is quite well, but so busy that we see little of him at home. He works without intermission."

She looked as though she would fain ask some other question. She played for a few minutes with the strings of her widow's cap, and her beautiful face flushed. Whatever the question might have been that she wished to ask it remained unspoken.

On that same evening her mother was at Garswood. Lady Chevenix seemed restless. She changed her seat continually, and then, tired of sitting, she walked up and down the room.

"You are very restless, Violet," said Mrs. Haye. "Why is it, my dear?"

"I want to hear some news of my Lilford friends; none of them come near me. How is Eve Lester, mamma? Has she a *fiance* yet? Is there any rumor of her marriage?"

"No. People say that she has refused some good offers —no one knows why," said Mrs. Haye.

"And—and Felix Lonsdale, mamma. Is he going to marry?"

For a moment Mrs. Haye looked keenly at her daughter, and then she answered, carelessly:

"I hear nothing of him. I do not think he will ever find time to marry; he has too much business."

"Does he—let me think—what is the Lilford phrase? Does he 'pay his addresses' to anybody?"

She waited restlessly for the answer.

"No," replied Mrs. Haye, "I have not heard that he does; in fact, he has no time."

She looked again at her daughter, but Violet's face was turned to the window.

Later on Mrs. Haye began talking to her of the brilliant second marriages she had heard of—marriages of fair young widows who had been left with large fortunes—how they had made most brilliant matches, married lords and dukes, filled grand positions, and made famous names. She did not say that there was a moral to be drawn from all this, but she left it for her daughter to think over.

So time passed, and at last Lady Chevenix wrote to implore Marian Hethcote to return to her, if only for a few days—for she was longing for a change. But, when Marian came, it was found that she had permission to remain six months, if Lady Chevenix desired it.

Miss Hethcote deplored the sudden and untimely death of the master of Garswood, but there could be no doubt her second visit was more pleasant than her first. Lady Chevenix was cheered by the presence of her young guest; it was novel to hear the sound of a laugh in the gloomy Hall. Marian said to her one day:

"Dear Lady Chevenix, do you know what, if I were in your place, I should do?"

"I cannot guess," she replied.

"I should leave Garswood for a few months or longer. This house is haunted, I am sure, for you."

"That is just it," she acknowledged; "it is haunted. If I go into the library I see my husband there. I fancy I hear his voice in the corridors. There is not a room in the house

which has not some sad or sorrowful association. I should like to go away, Marian. Will you come with me? Mamma cannot."

"I will go with pleasure," she replied. "Where shall we go? Shall it be to Scotland, Switzerland, or France?"

"Let us go to Normandy," said Lady Chevenix, "and I should like to stay away some time. Perhaps if your mamma wants to see you she will pay us a visit there. We will take some pretty chateau, and then I shall regain what I have lost—my health and youth and spirits."

So it was settled, and in three weeks after that conversation Lady Chevenix and Miss Hethcote left Garswood, to spend some months in picturesque Normandy.

Lady Chevenix sent for Darcy Lonsdale, and said farewell to him. She did another thing which pleased the lawyer very much, though he said little about it. When passing through London she sent such a hamper of toys to the Lonsdale children as had never been seen before. There was not one among them forgotten. To Katie she sent such ornaments that her eyes were dazzled as she looked at them; to Darcy himself she sent a superb diamond ring.

In the letter that accompanied these presents she said:

"I did not see your son, to bid him farewell; but tell him that I send my kindest wishes, and thanks for kind sympathy and help that I shall never forget."

Darcy Lonsdale looked at his son when he read the message; but Felix turned away without a word; nor did he ever mention Lady Chevenix's name. Darcy Lonsdale was pleased with her thoughtfulness.

"Her sorrow has done her good," he said to his wife.

But that obstinate little lady shook her head gravely; even the sparkling ornaments had not changed her opinion.

The state-rooms at Garswood were closed, and silence reigned where poor Sir Owen had at times made daylight hideous and night terrible. Again the neighborhood was delighted. Nothing could have been more proper. People told each other, with sympathetic faces, that "dear Lady Chevenix" had gone abroad to recruit herself after her great trial. Even Lady Rolfe said to herself that it was one of the most sensible things she could have done, and that, after all, she had turned out better than she for one had ever anticipated.

"I think, Lavinia," she said, "that it was fortunate you lost such a chance. A widow with so much wealth! It is very sad. I never like to think of it."

"I would not have changed places with Lady Chevenix

for all the money Sir Owen was worth," said the curate's wife. "I have at least a good, kind husband, mamma; while the poor girl lived in fear of losing her life. Money is a great advantage, but it is not all the world. I am happier now than I should have been had I married Sir Owen."

After a few days the gossip about Lady Chevenix died away, while she and Marian made themselves comfortable in their pretty chateau. Violet soon recovered her bloom; a lovely tinge as of a blush rose came to her face; her eyes grew brighter, and lost all their shadow; the last few years seemed to fall from her, and she looked young and fair—as she had looked when she married Sir Owen.

"You appear to be so well," said Marian to her one day, "yet you are so thoughtful. What are you always thinking about, Lady Chevenix?"

"Am I always thinking?" she asked, with a happy brooding light in her eyes. "I did not know it."

"What is it about? Something pleasant, I am sure, for you smile as you think, and at times a little pink flush creeps up to your hair even. I speak to you, and you do not hear me. I leave you, and you do not miss me. Why is it, I wonder?"

But Lady Chevenix made no answer. She never imparted to any one these the most treasured thoughts of her life.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"HOW I LOVE YOU!"

All Loomshire was shaken to its very center. Such news had not been heard in the neighborhood for years; there was a general sentiment of rejoicing. Lady Maude Arlington was going to be married—Lady Maude, whom all the inhabitants of the county looked upon as a princess. Whom was she going to marry? That was the question every one asked. And the answer gave universal pleasure. It was the hero of the Victoria Cross—Major Rawson. Every one was delighted with the alliance. Lady Maude was so beloved, while the name of Major Rawson was known wherever bravery or valor was honored.

The county awoke suddenly. There had been many queens since Lady Maude first began to reign, but none were like her, and Loomshire awoke to the knowledge that it was about to lose its chief ornament, and that the time was come to do all honor to the earl's daughter.

No one was more delighted than Felix. In his heart he

thought no one good enough for the noble, beautiful woman whom he admired, and who had been to him the best and truest of friends. He was sorry to lose her; he knew that Bramber Towers would never again be the place it had been while she reigned there; at the same time he was delighted that her noble life had its reward in a noble love.

Lady Maude could have told how she had loved the brave soldier before he went to the war in which he had gained such renown. She could have told how she had garnered her love in her heart, and had kept it as a priceless treasure, never dreaming that it could have a happy ending, yet preferring to love a hero, and love in vain, than to be the wife of a peer.

But Major Rawson loved her, and there was no obstacle to their marriage. He was heir to an ancient title, too, and a large fortune. She had a fortune of her own. So all Loomshire awoke, and roused itself to do honor to the marriage of its queen.

The marriage was to take place at the old parish church of Lilford. Lady Maude would have it so. The Countess of Arlington had suggested London, and St. George's, Hanover square. Lady Maude had laughed.

"Let it be in the old church on the hill, mamma," she had said. "It is an odd fancy, but I think I should not feel that I had been married unless those solemn old oaks had shaken their heads over me, and the rocks had held a conference about my wedding."

So, as Lady Maude had had her way all her life, she had it now, and the ceremony was to be performed in the old church.

The rejoicings were great and many. It would have done any one's heart good to have seen the ceremony, and the crowds of children with flowers to strew before the bride—to have seen the poor, the old, the infirm, all going up to the church to have one last, last look at her who had been so good to them all. It was a magnificent ceremony. Peers and peeresses, with some of the first people in the land, were there. The little gray church seemed to be filled with smiling faces and costly dresses. But to Lady Maude nothing on her wedding-day was so dear or so precious as the blessings of the children and the poor.

The wedding-breakfast was given at Bramber Towers—and so goodly a company had never sat there before. Mr. and Mrs. Lonsdale, with Felix, were invited. Of all the guests who clustered around the beautiful bride to bid her farewell, she gave most heed to Felix. She went aside with

him for a moment, for she read in his face that he longed to say something to her. She never forgot the few words that he did say. She laid her hand in his for a second; he bent down and kissed it, with tears in his eyes.

"How am I to thank you, Lady Maude," he said, "for all that you have done for me? You came to me in the darkest moment of my life, and I owe to you, after Heaven, all that I am. How must I thank you?"

She looked up with a smile into the handsome face that was full of emotion.

"You can thank me best," she replied, "by being, as the story books say, good and happy now and henceforward."

"I will try," he said, "and no one, Lady Maude, says 'Heaven bless you!' more fervently than I do—I, whom you saved from ruin."

As they drove down the long avenue, amid cheers and shouts and good wishes that were enough to deafen them, Major Rawson turned with a smile on his lips to his wife.

"I did not know that you had such a royal dowry, Maude."

"What dowry do you mean?" she asked.

"The dowry of blessings from young and old, rich and poor. What have you done to make all these people love you so?"

She raised her eyes to his.

"I have done nothing but my duty," she replied.

"Then you have done it with grace and sweetness," he said. "Teach me to do mine as well. If I could hear as many blessings follow me as follow you I should be happy."

"Are you not happy now?" she asked, with a charming smile.

His answer was prompt and decisive.

Knowing Miss Lester's secret predilection for hearing news that she was too proud to seek, Felix went over to the Outlands a few days afterward. He had not seen Eve lately, and was anxious about her. He had heard Kate say that she was not looking well—that she had grown thin and pale, and seemed to have lost some of her old bright spirit; and those few words had made Felix anxious. Finding one evening that he had an hour's leisure he thought that he could not do better than devote it to her.

Miss Lester was looking a little more cross and impatient than usual when the young lawyer greeted her, and he asked what was the matter.

"I am not pleased about the corn," she briefly replied.

"I am sorry to hear it. What is the matter with it?"

"It does not ripen as it should," she replied.

"That must be the fault of the sun," said Felix.

"No matter what is to blame, the misfortune is just the same," returned Miss Lester. "What has brought you here to-night, Mr. Felix? I saw your name in the *Loomshire Gazette.* You were present at all the gay doings at Bramber Towers."

"Yes," he replied, "I was there."

"Then tell me all about Lady Maude's marriage. It is not often that one has the opportunity of hearing about such grand affairs; tell me everything that you remember."

"I came on purpose to do so," said Felix. "I thought you would be pleased to hear about it. But shall we not wait for Eve? Perhaps she would be interested, too."

"No," replied Miss Lester, "she would not—unless it were about a marriage in the moon. I tell her always that she is waiting to marry the man in the moon. Sit down here by these bee-hives. Never mind the bees; they will not sting you unless you interfere with them. As I sit here I can see what is going on around me, and no man is idle while my eyes are on him. Tell me about Lady Maude first. Do you know, I heard a foolish rumor once, Felix Lonsdale?"

"I am afraid you have heard a great many false rumors in your time, Miss Lester," he remarked. "It seems to me that the world is full of them. What was the one you refer to"?

"I heard that you were in love with Lady Maude, and that she liked you," said Miss Jane, solemnly.

He laughed so heartily that she felt at once there was no truth in it. Her grim face relaxed at the sound of his mirth.

"How absurd!" he said. "There is no lady in England whom I hold in higher reverence and esteem than Lady Maude. As for being in love with her, it is sufficient to say that she is an earl's daughter, and in my own fashion I am as proud as a king. I would no more marry a rich woman, and live on her money than I would cheat or steal."

He marveled why Miss Jane looked so intently at him.

"I wonder if you will always think so?" she said, earnestly.

"I am quite sure that I shall. I think independence a noble quality, and one to which Englishmen especially may lay claim. I have a great respect for it, and shall ever exercise it."

"Now tell me about the wedding," said Miss Lester. And Felix gave her a most animated account of it.

She was delighted, and would have listened to him for another hour, but that her keen eyes detected a dairymaid enjoying the homage paid by one of the reapers.

"Go into the house and find Eve," she said. "I shall be with you directly."

Felix found Eve in the garden, and so intently was the girl thinking that she never heard his footsteps until he stood by her side.

"Eve!" he said, gently, and he was startled by the sudden change in her face when she saw him. It was dyed crimson, and the sweet, earnest eyes fell before his. She could not speak to him at once, and a sudden conviction flashed across his mind that at the moment he had accosted her she was thinking of him.

"My dear Eve," he said, "are we such strangers that you should be so startled by my presence? I was told you were not looking so well. and I am come to see."

"I am quite well," she answered, in her sweet, low voice, "and very pleased to see you."

"You look well enough just now. You have the color of a rose in your face," he told her. "May I find a seat here? I have an hour to spare, and am come to spend it with you."

He sat down on a little garden chair, under the luxuriant jessamine, and began to talk to her. A sense of peace and repose always came over him when he was with Eve—a sense so sweet that he never cared to disturb it, and the same magical feeling was stealing over him now. When they had been talking for some time, he looked at her, and then he saw how true Mrs. Lonsdale's words were. The sweet face had grown very thin and pale; there was a dull look in the tender eyes, as though she had wept bitter tears. She was much changed, and Felix was pained to see it. He marveled as to the cause, and then decided to question her.

"Eve," he said, gently, "you are not well. Why do you not go to the sea-side for change of air?"

"I am happier here than I should be anywhere," she replied.

His ears detected a tone of patient weariness in her voice.

"Eve," he said, impulsively, "I do not believe you are happy. Have you any trouble or sorrow? Trust me, as I trust you."

The sweet face looked up at him.

"I have no trouble," she answered, "and Heaven has been very good to me."

But long after Felix had gone away she sat under the luxuriant jessamine, and once she cried:

"Oh, my love, you will never know in this world how I love you!"

CHAPTER XLV.

MRS. HAYE'S RESERVE.

One fine morning in September a letter came to the office of Lonsdale & Son which presented very familiar features to those who received it. The creamy color of the envelope, the delicate handwriting, the faint perfume of violets, the crest on the seal—each and all were familiar.

"It is from Lady Chevenix," said Felix, as he placed it before his father—of all the letters that had been received from her he had never opened one.

Mr. Lonsdale read it, and then looked at his son.

"She is coming home," he announced. "She will be at Garswood by the end of the week, and wants me to see that everything is ready for her. I had better go over to the Hall at once. Ah, here is a postscript—there is sure to be one in a lady's letter!—'Remember me kindly to Mrs. Lonsdale—and Felix.' "

"She is very kind," said Felix, as he sorted his papers. "I suppose you told her what an accumulation of business awaits her?"

"Yes. I thought it time she either returned or gave me fuller powers of acting," replied Mr. Lonsdale. "I am glad she is coming home. I do not like the Hall to be closed; it makes the whole neighborhood dull."

Darcy Lonsdale rode off at once with his good news; and very pleased the household at Garswood were. Their young mistress had been worshiped among them, and they were delighted at the thought of her return. Mr. Lonsdale gave all necessary orders, so that Lady Chevenix should find everything ready on her return, and should not miss any comfort or luxury.

He called on Mrs. Haye, and found that she also had heard from her daughter, and that she was going to Garswood to be in readiness to receive her. Mrs. Haye had very ambitious views for her daughter; she had plenty of good advice to give her. Now that she had secured wealth and a title, she must look for something higher still.

"She ought to marry a duke next," she said to her husband, but Francis Haye answered:

"It is just possible she may not care to marry again."

His wife laughed at this.

"After proving herself so sensible, do you think she intends to retire upon her laurels? You may depend upon it, Francis, her second marriage will be far more brilliant than her first."

"You know best, of course, my dear," said Francis Haye, meekly. "Violet owes a great deal to your training."

"I flatter myself," remarked Mrs. Haye, "that I have made her what she is. My prudence and diplomacy, during her first foolish engagement to Felix Lonsdale, made her Lady Chevenix."

"That I believe, but I doubt if she has ever been really happy since. Do you remember how she used to smile and blush when Felix came?"

"It was childish nonsense; she has something better to do than smile and blush now," replied Mrs. Haye, severely. "I hope when she does come you will not encourage her in any nonsense. Only imagine—if we should live to see her a duchess! I always knew that she would be fortunate in life. What a cruel thing it would have been if she had married Felix Lonsdale!"

At the end of the week another letter came to the office at Lilford, asking Darcy Lonsdale to go over to Lady Chevenix at once. He went, and on his return he said to Felix:

"There is a terrible accumulation of work at Garswood. Lady Chevenix wishes me to remain at the Hall for a week, and clear up all arrears. It will occupy a week—the Michaelmas accounts are always heavy, but, Felix, I cannot spare a week. Lord Arlington's rent-dinner and many other things are close at hand. I do not think I can spare a week. I made a suggestion to Lady Chevenix, which she seemed very pleased with; it was that, instead of my going to the Hall for six days, we should both go for three—that is, of course, if you are willing."

"It is a matter of indifference to me, father," he replied. "Whichever plan suits you best, or pleases you best, I will follow."

"Then we will both go. It is far easier to go to Garswood and take a clerk with us than to have all that mass of documents brought to the office."

So it was settled that they were to go to the Hall, and do all the business as quickly as possible there.

"I shall prefer sitting up at night," said Felix. "I can always work better when there is perfect silence. A few hours' extra work each night, and we shall soon have finished."

He little dreamed to what that sitting up would lead.

They went on the Monday evening—a beautiful autumn evening, when the sunbeams fell on the gray walls and lighted up the picturesque mass of buildings. Several visitors were at the Hall. Captain Bell, Mrs. Haye, Miss Hethcote—who seemed as though she would never leave Lady Chevenix again—Lady Browning, and Miss Fern—all guests whom Lady Chevenix had invited.

Father and son were taken at once to her boudoir, where she sat alone, and never in her whole life had Violet looked so charming. The year of quietness and repose in the climate of Normandy had been marvelously beneficial to her. While there she had not a shadow of care; she had studied nothing except to forget the past, to realize her good fortune, and to recruit her health. The consequence was that she returned with a lovely and dainty bloom. There was no longer the faintest shadow on her face; it was full of radiant, laughing light; the violet eyes were clear and bright as stars, the scarlet lips untroubled.

Felix looked at her as she stood in the light of the setting sun, and his eyes were dazzled by her beauty and loveliness. She wore a dress of rich black velvet cut square, so as to show the white neck, on which a diamond cross gleamed like fire. She wore diamond bracelets on her arms; diamond stars shone in the coils of golden hair.

In kindliest greeting she held out her white jeweled hands to Mr. Lonsdale and his son, but her marvelous beauty had for a few minutes stricken them dumb.

"I am so delighted," she said, and truth shone in her beautiful eyes. "I thought I would see you here first, away from the other guests, because I wanted to talk to you. Mr. Lonsdale, take this easy-chair. Felix"—she had quite fallen into the old fashion of calling him Felix—"sit here. I did not see you"—to Felix—"to bid you good-by; but I am pleased to see you on my return. There is no place like home, after all, is there? Normandy was very beautiful, but Garswood is home. Now tell me all that has been done in Lilford since I left. You were at Lady Maude's wedding—tell me about it, Felix. I am so glad she married her hero after all."

They spent one of the pleasantest hours that could be imagined. The same idea struck both father and son.

Lady Chevenix seemed to have grown young again; her sunny smiles, her unusual laughter, her quick, clever repartee, her keen enjoyment of their society—all were noticeable. She had indeed altered; she was like beautiful Violet Haye; all trace of the quiet, cold Lady Chevenix had vanished.

Then her smiles died away for a few minutes as they talked of the terrible trial they had gone through together. She looked with soft, luminous eyes into Darcy Lonsdale's face.

"What old friends we are!" she said, thoughtfully. "And how strange it seems that you should have been with me when he died—that Felix should have been my chief comfort! What a riddle life is to read!"

After a few minutes Mr. Lonsdale remarked:

"You must not charm us into forgetting our work, Lady Chevenix; there is so very much to be done."

"You can begin as early as you like in the morning," she said, "but this one evening you must give to me. Think what a pleasure it is to me to talk to such old friends. I shall get up early, too, and see that you have breakfast before you begin. I shall make your tea; I am sure that no one else could make it nicely enough."

Darcy Lonsdale told her laughingly that she would spoil him, and both gentlemen were surprised to find that they had been talking for an hour instead of a few minutes.

They arose when the first bell rang for dinner, and Lady Chevenix, looking at Felix, asked him:

"How is Evelyn Lester?"

He told her that she was not looking either bright or well lately, and then they separated.

Long after father and son had left her the beautiful woman sat with a happy, brooding light in her eyes, and a smile like summer sunshine on her lips. And when she arose to return to her visitors she murmured to herself:

"At last, my love, at last!"

It was a pleasant evening; the dinner-party was bright and cheerful, and after dinner the guests had music, cards, and conversation. More than once Lady Chevenix made room for Felix near her, and talked to him. But, if Lady Chevenix was unusually kind, Mrs. Haye was unusually cold to him; whenever she saw her daughter talking to him, under some pretext or other she interrupted the conversation. She tried to patronize him, but all efforts at patronage recoiled upon herself. There are some men who

never will be patronized, and he was one; his natural pride and dignity of character quite prevented it.

The evening was a very pleasant one. Lady Chevenix was a charming hostess, she neglected no one. She had the rare gift of making every one feel perfectly at home, and each one separately seemed to be her most favored guest. Felix could not help contrasting that visit with his last, when she had suffered such tortures of anxiety and humiliation. He could not help thinking of the unhappy man who had died so young, victim to his own folly—the man who had once been master of all this wealth and had made bad use of it.

It was a pleasant evening. If Felix had been more vain he must have seen with what great respect and consideration he was treated—how Lady Chevenix deferred to him on every point—how she consulted his tastes, his wishes, his convenience. If he had been more vain he would have been more flattered by it—he would have seen it. But he did not. The chief thing that struck him was the coldness and reserve of Mrs. Haye.

During the next few days father and son worked hard; they arose early and did not leave work until it was time to prepare for dinner. Darcy Lonsdale declared that Lady Chevenix would spoil him. She devoted herself almost entirely to their comfort; she studied them.

At the end of the third day there yet remained three or four hours' hard work.

"We must go to-morrow," said Darcy; "we must leave the first thing in the morning, let what will happen."

Felix decided to go back to his writing immediately after dinner, and not to pause again until he had finished. That was the only plan. Lady Chevenix smiled thoughtfully when she heard it.

"It will be best," she agreed. "I will see that Felix has a cheerful fire and refreshments. How good you both are to work so hard over my affairs!"

So, when the dinner was ended Felix went back to the library and began to write. Lady Chevenix sent him a cup of her favorite *cafe noir*. Later on a servant carried in a refreshment-tray, which was placed on a table near him. He heard the sound of music and laughter, which, as night drew on, ceased. His father came in and said "Good-night" to him, and then silence fell over the house.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TEST.

As Felix Lonsdale wrote busily, there came to him the memory of a story he had read in which a lawyer like himself sat alone in the library of a country-house, and the spirit of its dead owner came to tell him of some wrong that he had done in life.

"It is a pleasant thought!" smiled Felix to himself, and then he was startled for a moment. A faint odor of violets floated near him, and, looking up, he saw Lady Chevenix.

She was standing by his side, looking down on him with a light on her face that had not shone there for long years. Never had this beautiful woman looked more beautiful than now, with her charming head bent over him, standing in the half-darkened room like a vision of light. The crimson glow of the fire and the soft radiance from the lamp on the table fell over her. She wore a very handsome dress, which showed her lovely shoulders, her white neck and rounded arms—a dress that in the ruddy firelight presented most marvelous hues. With it she wore a diamond necklace, and diamond stars shone in the golden hair.

There was something more than beauty in her face; he knew it the moment he raised his eyes and saw her. There was love—love such as had not shone there since she had bidden him farewell. The firelight gleamed on her jeweled hand, on her marvelous face, her golden hair. She stood before him in all the pride and magnificence of her wealth and her loveliness, a vision such as rarely greets the eyes of men. And, as he looked at her, with somewhat of wonder and inquiry on his face, she sank slowly on to her knees, and bent her head before him.

"Lady Chevenix," he cried, "you must not do that! I cannot allow it!"

She laid her hand on his arm—the hand on which shone her wedding-ring.

"Listen to me, Felix," she said, and the sweet voice stirred unwontedly his heart and soul. "I have waited impatiently for this hour. You are going away to-morrow, and I must speak to you to-night. Marian is in the anteroom there; I brought her with me. I told her I must

speak to you to-night, and she came at once. Felix, will you listen?"

"How can I help but listen?" he replied. "What do you wish to say to me, Lady Chevenix?"

With a charming gesture of impatience she laid a finger on his lips.

"You must not call me 'Lady Chevenix,'" she said. "I am 'Violet' to you. Say 'Violet,' and then I will tell you what I came for."

Perhaps, if he had had time to prepare himself, to think matters over, to take some precautions, he would have known better how to listen, and what to say. As it was, she seemed suddenly to have taken possession of him, of his whole nature.

"You make me say what you will, Violet," he said.

She clasped her hands, and laid them upon his arm.

"I want to tell you a story, Felix," she said—"give me your attention while I narrate it. Years ago there was a girl—young, foolish, and, the world said, fair. She was vain, too, of her beauty, and expected to achieve great things with it. She loved with all her heart some one who was more than worthy of her love, and she promised to be his wife. But sorrow and misfortune came to him, while a wealthy wooer sought her—one who offered her wealth and title, houses and lands—and she—well, I am ashamed of her, Felix. She was vain, and much weaker than a woman; she was young, too, and not over-wise. She had nobility enough, however, to see what was right, though not to do it. She was tempted by her love of luxury and comfort—she was badly advised, wrongly influenced; and she, weaker, I say again, than a woman, gave up her lover—the one man in the world whom she loved—and married the wealthy suitor. How she suffered no one knows, no one can tell. Her marriage turned out to be a most disastrous one. She had money, luxury of every kind, but she never had one moment of happiness—one moment of peace, of rest. She had outward brilliancy and pleasure; but her life was one round of lamentation and anxious sorrow. No one knew what she suffered; no one knew how she regretted the lost true dear love who would have made her life a heaven on earth. After she was married she met him again, and—well, he was always cold and distant to her. What she thought and what she suffered was known to herself. Then, after long years of humiliating servitude, she was alone again, and free. What do you think she did, Felix?"

"I cannot say," he replied, in a low, hoarse voice.

"I will tell you. After those long years she found that she still loved the dear companion of her youth. She said to herself that he had never married—perhaps he still cared for her—and one night, when he was sitting alone, she went to him—as I have come to you—knelt by his side—as I kneel by yours—and prayed to him—as I pray to you—'Oh, my lost love, my dear love, forgive me, and take me to your heart again!'" And the lovely head drooped until it lay upon his arm.

He made no answer just then. His whole soul was stirred within him—his whole heart touched. After a few minutes she raised her face to his, and he saw tears upon it.

"Violet," he said, "I do not know what to say to you. You have taken me so completely by surprise. I am lost—bewildered. I cannot collect myself."

"I thought you would say 'Yes' to me at once," she returned, sadly. "Oh, Felix, have you not forgiven me? Tell me that first. Have you forgiven me?"

He looked at her thoughtfully, watching the firelight gleaming on her golden hair and on her rich jewels.

"Yes, I have forgiven you, Violet—I forgave you long ago."

"Quite, or was it only a half forgiveness, Felix?"

"Quite," he replied. "I am sure of it. My heart was full of hot anger for many long months, but it died away, and then, when I saw that you were not happy, I forgave you."

"With all your heart, Felix?"

"With all my heart," he answered, and then there was silence for a few minutes between them.

"You forgave me? Then, Felix, why will you not take me into your heart again?"

His face grew deadly pale—his hands trembled. She saw such deep emotion in his face that her own grew pale.

"You see but one side of the question," he said. "Now listen to me. I loved a girl, Violet—ah, Heaven, how I loved her! She was the very light of my eyes! She was the pulse of my heart! She was the very soul of my life—my one priceless jewel! She loved me—her fair face brightened for me—her sweet eyes rained love and kindness on me—her voice made all my music! I had no life outside her sweet life! Heaven forgive me, I worshiped her—no man ever worshiped a woman so madly, so blindly, or so well. If at any time my poor life would have served her, I would have given it. If at any time I

could have died for her, I would have died. And she was kind to me. It drives me mad even now, when I remember that she once placed her arms around my neck and promised to be my wife. Then over the heaven of my content what clouds came! I was working—as man seldom works—to make a home for my darling, and place her in it. I was seeking every picture, every ornament that I thought would beautify a home, for one who would herself adorn it most. What happened? A wealthier lover came—not, mind you, one who loved her more, not one whom she could love—a man, to say the best of him, coarse of soul and hard of heart; he could not even appreciate the exquisite loveliness of my love. He held out his hands to her, and they were filled with gold; he offered her title, money, jewels—everything that women love. He laughed to scorn the notion that any tie to me bound her. 'Leave him,' he said—'he is poor. Come to me—I am rich.' What did she do, this love of mine, who held my heart in her hands?"

The beautiful head drooped lower and lower.

"Have pity on me, Felix," she cried, "have pity!"

"I do not mean to be hard; I am only telling the truth. That is my version of the story, Violet. What did she do? Did the first noble instincts of true womanhood come to her? Did she turn with fidelity to me? No. She flung my love back in my face, she trampled my life under her feet, and she crushed my heart in her hand—she jilted me. Nay, do not shrink from the word, Violet; it is the only one. She jilted me—left me to be the subject of men's laughter and women's jeers—left me to a burning fire of anguish that nothing could slacken or cool—left me with my life ruined."

Again she raised her hands to him, and cried:

"Have pity on me! You are terribly hard."

"Nay, I am but just, Violet. And then this woman who had left me to laughter and ruin came to me—oh, Heaven, that women can be so light—came to me with a smile, and asked me to take her into my heart again. The past, which had been one long agony to me, was to be condoned by a smile, the torture of years to be soothed by a few kind words!"

He stopped; the passion of his own words mastered him.

"You said you had forgiven me, dear," and Violet's hands touched his clustering hair.

"Yes, I have forgiven you. Listen to me, Violet. She came to me again, this woman who had betrayed me, with

the dead man's spoils in her hand. She came to me bright with jewels, radiant with the magnificence his wealth had provided for her—the wealth for which she left me. She held out her hands to me laden with his treasures; she brought to me the spoils her perfidy and falsehood had won for her. I should be less than a man if I shared those spoils wth her—should I not, Violet? When you left me, and men laughed because you had left me for money, my very sorrow had a dignity in it. What should I be now, even in your eyes, if I took you back to my heart with the same money that your falsehood had won? I should be less than a man."

"I cannot understand you," she said, piteously.

In his passion he seemed to rise to a height which that weak soul could not reach, but the pitiful, pleading voice touched him and made him gentle again. He looked down into the lovely face.

"Violet, you will understand this. Suppose that when you loved me most I had lett you and had married a rich woman—a woman whom I did not love, but married solely because she was rich—that she died after a few years, and I came back to you with her money in my hands, and asked you to share it—would you do so?"

"Yes, I think I should, Felix."

"Perhaps I might have expected such an answer from you. I would not act in such a fashion. I should be less than a man now to take dead Sir Owen's gold, and with it you."

She looked at him with a half bewildered air, yet still seemed to think that she could persuade and soften him by sweet words.

"I have been so unhappy without you, Felix," she murmured. "You do not know all; it seemed to me as though I had lost the half of my soul when I lost you—it is not wrong to say so to you now. I was very unhappy, Felix. I found out soon afterward that I could never be happy without you."

He made no answer, and she took courage. She laid her face on his arm. The waves of golden hair fell over his hands.

"Do forgive me, Felix," she said. "I was so young, and so thoughtless. I did not understand."

So she knelt, while the firelight played over her, and the face of Felix Lonsdale was turned from her.

"I am sorry for it all, Felix," the sweet voice went on—"so very sorry. You see, dear, there were great excuses

for me, though they do not seem great to you. I was very vain—every one flattered me and praised me, and I was led away. I thought my beauty was great enough to merit any station. Then, Felix, I was so young—oh, my dear, forgive me, I was so young—and foolish! I have repented of it ever since. I love you now just as much as when we stood in the moonlight together."

He raised her face and looked into it. It was beautiful enough to tempt any man to forego honor. He looked into the depths of the violet eyes.

"You are sorry for it, Violet," he said—"really and truly sorry?"

"Yes, I am, indeed, Felix," and her hands were clasped around his own. "I am, dear—my life has been all regret."

"Answer me truly—if the time came over again, would you act in the same manner?"

The soft eyes wavered half a moment, and then fell.

"I cannot tell; it cannot come over again. That is a strange question. Answer me one—truly, Felix. Do you love me?"

She saw the sudden gleam of passion light in his face and deepen in his eyes.

"Do I love you? Yes. Heaven help me, I do! If I did not love you, I should not suffer."

"You are quite sure that you have not met any one since whom you liked even ever so little, Felix?"

"No," he answered; "when a man has loved a woman like you, Violet, it is not easy to forget her."

"Then, Felix, if you love me and I love you, why should we not be happy? What stands between us?"

"My own honor," he replied—"my dignity as a man, my pride as a gentleman. If you were penniless, Violet, I would kneel to you, I vow, and pray you to be my wife."

"What stands between us, Felix?" she asked again.

"Your dead husband's gold—the gold for which you broke your plighted troth and left me. You say, Violet, that you were young and thoughtless when you sinned, that you hardly realized all you were doing. I believe that. Suppose now I believed in you, and again let myself drift upon the golden sea of hope and love. Some wealthier suitor might come—an earl this time—and you would leave me once more."

"No, never again," she cried, clinging to him—"never again!"

His face softened into deepest tenderness as he looked at

her. The old love so long trampled down and repressed seemed to leap into new and vigorous life.

"Never again!" she repeated. "I love you—and I would be true to you!"

"Then give me a proof. I hate this wealth for which you forsook me! I hate this splendor and magnificence for which you bartered your truth and fidelity. I will never benefit by them. They robbed me of you, they destroyed the best part of my life—I will have none of them. No man shall say of me that I profited by your falsehood and enjoyed the price of your sin—for it was a sin, Violet. Listen to me, my darling. This is what my honor dictates—and my honor is dearer to me than my life. I love you, and ask no higher gift from Heaven than to call you my own; but you must come to me unfettered with dead Sir Owen's wealth—I will have none of it. You must give up your mansion, your jewels, your servants—all the magnificence furnished by him. I will provide a beautiful house for you—not grand and stately like his, but a home that shall be a heaven of love. You married for money, Violet—money did not bring you happiness. Now marry for love—that will."

She looked up at him with a bewildered air.

"I do not understand. Do you mean that I am to surrender all the fortune my husband has left me?"

"I mean just that, Violet; I will never share it."

"But, Felix," she said, "that would be absurd, now that it is all mine to do as I like with. What could I do with it?"

"Build hospitals, churches—anything you like except keep it."

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Do you not think that that is very hard?" she said.

"No, I do not; to share it, to benefit by it, would seem to me like sharing a sin. There is the true test of love, Violet. I forgive with all my heart the fault that you say was committed in the thoughtlessness of youth—now I give you the chance of redeeming it. Give up the wealth that tempted you to do me wrong, and I will bless the day that brings you to me again."

He looked at the diamond necklace she wore; unclasping it, he laid it upon the table.

"Your neck is a thousand times more beautiful," he said, "without that circlet. Can you give up all such deckings, Violet?"

"It is such a thing to ask me," she said.

"It is a true test of love. You had to choose once before between me and money—then you chose money. I place the two before you again—which will you choose? You can not plead youth, or ignorance, or vanity, or even undue influence now. You have learned many things, and I say this is a true test of love. But, Violet, it is not fair to ask you to decide hurriedly—take time over it. It is much to ask, I know; but I offer something better in return—and you shall never repent the sacrifice."

"All the world would laugh at me," she said.

"The world would say you had given up all for love. But, Violet, mind, I do not wish to persuade you. I leave the decision to yourself. For the second time in your life you have to choose between love and money. Ponder it, and tell me in a few days what you have decided upon."

She looked up at him wistfully.

"Is that your final decision, Felix?" she asked.

"Yes; I cannot change it, Violet. Most men make an idol of something; my idol is self-respect," he replied.

"Could you not make an idol of me?" she whispered.

"Yes, if you are not framed in a golden setting," he answered.

She was silent then for a few minutes, while the firelight played over her golden hair, and he drew the long shining tresses through his fingers. She laid her head on his breast and closed her eyes.

"Let me rest here for a few minutes," she said; "here only have I ever found rest on earth."

When she raised her eyes to his they were wet with tears.

"Felix," she said, "I must go now; it is growing late. Will you kiss me before I go?"

He bent down and kissed the lovely face—not once, but many times. Then she arose to quit the room. He remembered long afterward how she kept her eyes fixed on his face until she reached the door.

"Good-by, Felix," she said, and the very tone of her voice was like a sigh.

He had kept himself outwardly very calm during the interview. Violet did not know what a terrible tempest was raging within him. He threw aside paper and pen when the door was closed.

"I can write no more," he said.

His heart beat fast and his brain seemed to be on fire—every pulse throbbed wildly, every nerve was strained.

"I must go out into the air," he told himself; "these walls are stifling me."

He went out through the window, and he spent the night, as he had spent many another, in walking rapidly, so that he might beat down the temptation that was come to him.

For it was a temptation. So loving and so lovely, so gracious and fair, was Violet that he could have clasped her to his breast, and have cried out in rapture that she was his. But honor stood between them. He would never accept the dead man's gold.

In the morning he did not see Violet at the early breakfast. Miss Hethcote came down and made tea. Lady Chevenix had sent her, she said. She did not seem quite well. Miss Hethcote looked inquiringly at Felix, as though she would fain ask what had passed between them, but no word was spoken, and Darcy Lonsdale left Garswood quite unconscious that it had been offered to his son.

The next two days were days of torture to Felix. How he passed them he never knew. On the third came a letter in the well-known handwriting, with the faint familiar odor of violets. He knew it was Violet's answer; and, though he was a strong, brave man, he trembled to open it. Within that folded paper lay the words that might affect the whole of his future life. Either Violet had written to say that for his sake she would give up wealth, luxury, and magnificence, or she had decided on giving him up to retain that to which perhaps her heart clung.

"It was the only test," he said, as he took the letter in his hand.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A QUIET WEDDING.

This was Violet's response to Felix Lonsdale's request about dead Sir Owen's wealth:

"My Dear Felix:—I have thought well over the matter recently discussed by us, and I have decided. I know that I am weaker than a woman—but I cannot give up my fortune. It seems to me such a foolish thing to do. After being accustomed to every luxury, I could not give it up. I love you, and shall always love you; but the test was too hard. I have pictured myself back in the old scenes, leading the old life, and I could not undergo it. I would most cheerfully share all I have with you, but I cannot give it up for you—do you think it was quite right to ask me?

"I do not suppose I shall ever be happy—but you will. I am not noble enough for you; and, if you had married me your disappointment would have been great. You will meet some day a noble woman whom you will love and marry. I know that, in saying 'good-by' now, I say it forever; but forever I shall be your unhappy, VIOLET."

He laid the letter down and looked at it. He had almost expected such an answer, yet his disappointment was great, and his eyes filled with tears. It had been very sweet and very dear to him, this precious love-story—and the end was sorrow; still he could not be surprised.

"She has chosen that which she loves best," he said, "and I cannot blame her now. I must try to forget her."

He did it bravely, as he had done it before. He threw his whole heart into his work, and fought inch by inch with the great master-passion of his life.

For some time after that it was rumored in Lilford that Lady Chevenix was not well; that she had lost her color and her spirits; that she was ill and saw no one. Then quite suddenly she sent for Darcy Lonsdale, and told him that she had come to the conclusion that the air of Garswood did not suit her; that for the future she intended to divide her time between London and Paris. To his surprise, she added that the Marquis of Renmore had offered to buy the Garswood estates, and that she thought of selling them to him; but it would be only on condition that he retained Darcy Lonsdale as his agent.

After some months, during which Lady Chevenix and Felix never met, this was accomplished; but her ladyship's removal was prevented for a time by the sudden death of Francis Haye. Then Mrs. Haye sold the Limes and went away with her daughter. So it came to pass that, before six months were over, the names of Chevenix and Haye were no longer to be found in the county.

Great had been the surprise. The whole neighborhood was stirred. It was much to be regretted that such a change should take place. But Lord Arlington and Captain Hill said gravely that it was the best thing Lady Chevenix could do. She had suffered much at the Hall—she would probably begin quite new in life in an unfamiliar place.

The new occupants of Garswood—the Marquis of Renmore, with his two maiden sisters and a large household of servants—gave more satisfaction to the public in general than the wealthy baronet had done. It was an excellent agency for the Lonsdales, who, by dint of industry and perseverance, were rapidly amassing a fortune. Darcy was

growing old, and did not go so often to the office. The "small army" were rapidly growing up. Everything was prosperous and happy where so many trials had once seemed to threaten general destruction. Kate was one of the leading ladies now in Lilford—and very much enjoyed the position. Time had softened Miss Lester, while Eve had grown more beautiful and *spirituelle.*

Felix worked on steadily. He still made his home with his father, but Katie, in speaking of him, said, with tears in her eyes, that some day Providence would reward him for his goodness to them, and that he would find a wife worthy to be his partner for life.

He went to see Evelyn when he had an hour to spare; they were the best of friends. Years afterward he saw how she had guided him without ever seeming to advise—how she had influenced him without ever seeming to use her influence; and when he began the great battle of political life she was his right hand.

The time that had been foreseen and prophesied had arrived. The borough of Ordstone was vacant, and through the interest of Lord Arlington, Felix had been returned.

It was no surprise, for every one had prophesied it. Genius must and will make its way to the front when it is allied with perseverance and industry; genius alone does little.

"M. P. for Ordstone." Felix Lonsdale was pleased—he exulted as men exult. He had now a foremost place—he had made a name. Like all other men worthy of anything, he was ambitious; and it seemed to him that his ambition would be realized.

On the evening of the day of his election it was some relief to him to escape from the noise of the crowd, and spend a quiet hour with Evelyn. How she rejoiced with him! How she exulted in his success! How wise and sweet she was in her counsel! It seemed to him as though his soul had found one more than a friend.

"My foot is on the first step of the ladder. Eve, how high shall I climb, do you think?"

He never forgot the beautiful, earnest look on her fair face as she answered:

"As high as heaven, I hope."

And those few words, spoken by the tender lips of a noble woman, were to him like an eloquent sermon. From that hour his life seemed to have higher and better aims, and into it came no dream of woman's love, until one day,

Kate, having some leisure, had a long conversation with him.

"Can you understand an allegory, Felix?" she asked him.

"Yes, I think so," he replied. "Try me, *madre.*"

"There was once a man," began Kate, "who stood with his feet firmly planted upon the earth, and his eyes very often looking up at the clouds. At his feet lay a most beautiful pearl of priceless value, and at a distance lay a worthless piece of shining glass. This man of whom I speak trod upon the pearl until it was almost hidden in the dust, while he went eagerly in search of the bit of glass. Do you understand, Felix?" she asked, after a few minutes.

"Only very vaguely, *madre.* I am the man. I recognize the bit of shining glass, but not the pearl."

"Not the pearl!" repeated Kate. "Well, that proves what I have often thought, that, while men may be clever and keen and intellectual, they may, at the same time, be blind as bats. That pearl has been under your eyes for many years. Ah, I see you do not understand!"

Nor did he. Kate went on talking to him.

"You will be a man of mark, Felix—every one says so. But you will be like all other men; you will want a good wife. If the facts could be got at, it would be found that some of the greatest men of the day owe much of their fame to the wise guidance of a wise wife."

"I believe that," he replied, "but—ah, well, we need not talk about it, *madre.* I suppose a man's fate is settled for him."

"A man's fate is just what he likes to make it," declared Kate. "When you are inclined to marry, never mind beauty; look out for a noble woman—nobility of character is far better than beauty."

The words struck him as being but the repetition of other words written to him.

"The world is full of noble women," Kate continued. "Look at Eve Lester. Where would you find one sweeter, more gracious, or noble? She is true and tender and earnest; she has a fund of clear common sense; she has a vivid, bright imagination, a quick, poetical fancy; and, as for beauty, I see more in her sweet, fair face than in any face I have ever seen."

"Eve Lester!" he cried. "Certainly no woman could be nobler. Oh, *madre*, is she the pearl?"

"Yes; you most blind, most dear, most obtuse of good

boys! She is the pearl, and you never saw her in your hurry to pick up the worthless shining colored glass."

Eve Lester. How blind he had been! He looked up at Kate.

"Do you know, *madre*," he said, "she has been so much part of my life—all my life—that I have never thought of her apart from myself."

A wise woman always knows when she has said enough. Kate turned the conversation; nor could he persuade her to say more about Eve. But the idea had taken hold of him, and Kate smiled softly to herself on seeing how deeply he was engrossed in thought during the remainder of that evening.

Felix had never realized until then what Eve was to him. He went back over all his life. She had been his adviser, his counselor, his friend. She had aroused all noble thoughts in him, all great desires. She had fired his ambition; she had shown him his road in life. He had never dreamed how much he owed to her influence until he thought all this over.

He remembered how, in the darkest hour of his father's life, when earth was all cold, and the heavens seemed made of brass, she came to his house like an angel of light and consolation. She had offered him her all, and was honestly grieved because he would not take it. As Felix sat thinking of her, he recalled a thousand instances of her sweet wisdom and goodness.

"It is true," he mused; "we are sometimes perfectly ignorant of our greatest blessings. I should never have known all that Eve has been to me until I lost her."

Under this new light, he said to himself that he must see her, he must go over and talk to her, he must discover what she really was to him—how dear, how needful—and he would do it at once; there should be no delay.

He went the next day, and the result of their conversation was that he did not leave her until she had promised to be his wife; for he found out that she loved him, and had loved him only all her life—he found out that he had indeed been blind and foolish, for she was really the one great treasure of his life.

The engagement afforded the greatest of pleasure to all their friends; there was not one dissentient voice. And now, indeed, Kate Lonsdale was happy.

"I shall be the dowager Lady Lonsdale," she said to Eve, with a happy laugh. "There has been only one mis-

take from the beginning. Felix ought to have chosen you from the first."

"It is sufficient," returned Eve, "that he has chosen me now."

She asked him one day:

"Why do you always call me 'Pearl,' Felix? It is not my name."

"It is my name for you," he replied, "and I shall use no other." But he never told her why; the past conversation between Kate and himself remained a secret.

There could have been no happier marriage. Felix had a beautiful house prepared for his wife—not the pretty cottage *orne* where his golden-haired love had stood and decided that it was not good enough for her, but a fair and pleasant mansion, standing in the midst of sunny grounds—a home that a princess might have envied because of its artistic beauty and bright aspect.

It was a quiet wedding, but Eve would have it so. She would have neither carriages nor a train of bridesmaids, nor children strewing flowers, nor any of the ceremonies that attend a country public wedding. She walked quietly to the dear old church at Lilford, looking very fair and sweet, with the light flush caused by the morning air on her face. The sunlight streamed in at the windows as she plighted her faith to the only man she had ever loved, and whom she was to love forever.

Then Felix took her away to the Lakes, and they were very happy.

They were sitting one day on the border of Windermere, when Eve raised her sweet face to her husband, and said:

"Felix, you love me very much now?"

"Yes, my pearl—more than you know," he replied.

"Do you—do not be cross with me because I ask the question—do you ever think of Violet?"

He took her hands in his own, and kissed them.

"Listen, darling," he said. "I will answer you in other words than my own—sweeter, indeed, than any words that I could say:

"'Within the kingdom of my soul
I bid you enter, love, to-day—
Submit my life to your control,
And give my heart up to your sway.

"'One only thought remains apart,
And will forever so remain;
There is one chamber in my heart—
There even you might knock in vain.

"'A haunted chamber, long ago
I closed it, and I cast the key
Where deep and bitter waters flow
Into a waste and silent sea.

"'Dear, it is haunted. All the rest
Is yours; but I have shut that door
Forever now. 'Tis even best
That I should enter it no more.

"'No more. It is not well to stay
With ghosts, their very look would scare
Your joyous loving smile away—
So never try to enter there.

"'Check, if you love me, all regret
That this one thought remains apart;
Now let us smile, dear, and forget
The haunted chamber in my heart.'"

When he had finished he bent down, and kissed the fair face, and Eve, knowing the way to his heart, said:

"I am quite content, and I trust you."

And they talked of other things, while the sun shone over the lake and the birds sang their sweetest.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DESOLATE SPLENDOR.

Five years had passed since Felix took his fair wife home to Eden House—he would call it "Eden" because it held his Eve—and Eve was now one of the happiest women in the kingdom. For in the room where she spent her mornings—a bright sunny room looking upon a beautiful world of trees and flowers—stood a little cot, and in this cot slept a baby—Eve's baby. He was, his mother said, the loveliest, the finest, the most intelligent in the whole world, and Felix laughed as she defied any one to produce such another.

Felix wanted Eve to accompany him for the Parliamentary session. She looked longingly at the baby, and then longingly at him.

"How can I possibly leave little Lester?" she said. "Aunt Jane would take great care of him, but she says he wants reforming—and I should not like to have him reformed."

"Bring him with you, Pearl, and he can assist the Legislature of the nation," replied Felix, laughingly.

And Eve was only too pleased to comply.

No happier household ever settled for a time in the modern Babylon. Felix took very nice apartments, where his wife could enjoy London to her heart's content. Eve was wise in one respect. She never merged the wife in the mother. She never neglected her husband for her child. She was so discreet and wise in the management of her time that, while she was one of the most devoted mothers in the world, she was at the same time one of the most devoted wives. Felix never felt, as some husbands do, that he had a rival in his own child.

They went to London when Parliament opened, and when May came around the great city wore its fairest dress.

They sat at breakfast one bright morning, with "the unequaled baby," as Felix called him, rolling on a thick rug at their feet, when a letter was brought addressed to "Mrs. Felix Lonsdale, 13 Upper Park Gardens," and, as he placed it in his wife's hand, Felix recognized the delicate handwriting, while he smelled a faint odor of violets.

Eve opened it quickly, and then, pale and breathless, looked up at her husband.

"Listen, Felix," she said, after a few seconds, and she read:

"My Dear Eve:—I should like to see you and Felix once more. My husband is not well, and the doctors have ordered him to go to the south of France or Italy—we think of going to Florence—and it may be years before I return. Let me see you both before I go. When I read your names among the arrivals, it seemed to me that a breath of Lilford air passed over me. You will not refuse me the last favor I shall ever ask of you? Call at Rokely House at two o'clock today. I shall wait for you. Ever your friend, Violet Rokely."

Eve looked up again.

"Rokely!" she said. "Why, Felix, is Violet married again?"

"She married the Duke of Rokely three months ago," replied Felix. "I said nothing to you about it. She has married one of the wealthiest dukes in England."

"She was beautiful enough for a duchess," said Eve, gently.

"She is not so beautiful in my eyes as you, my pearl," rejoined Felix, and there was truth in his voice. His wife smiled.

"What about the haunted chamber?" she asked.

"It is swept and garnished," he replied. She smiled proudly.

"When I heard what you said about it I made a resolution that I would get into the haunted chamber," she told

him. "Some one said once that blonde women were all insipid and weak of purpose. It is not true, is it, Felix?"

"No," he replied.

"Now," said his lovely wife, "if I looked into that chamber, what should I see?"

"Your own image," he answered, and she believed him.

"We will go and see Violet, Duchess of Rokely," she said, "if you are willing. That is not the letter of a happy woman."

She understood why he was so anxious about her toilet —why he insisted that she should wear the fashionable spring silk and the pretty Parisian bonnet. He kissed her when she stood ready dressed.

"I am so proud of you, my darling," he whispered.

And those few words brought a lovely flush to her fair face and made her fairer than ever; then they drove off together to Rokely House.

It was one of the finest ducal mansions in London. Eve was awe struck as the great hall door opened and she saw the liveried servants and the magnificence that might have befitted the palace of a king. Her Grace, the Duchess of Rokely was at home, and awaited them.

They went through suite after suite of magnificent rooms until they reached her grace's boudoir, where she had elected to receive them. It was a superb apartment—octagon-shaped — the panels and ceiling most exquisitely painted, the hangings all of blue velvet and gold; priceless treasures of art lavishly scattered around, buhl, marquetry, old china, rare pictures, most exquisite statues—ornaments of gold and silver, and in the midst of all this magnificence stood an imperially beautiful woman, who looked at it all with proudly contemptuous eyes.

Violet had grown even more beautiful. Her superb figure was more fully developed; her fair face had something in it haughtier and colder. Very proud she looked as she stood there, dressed in her favorite colors, blue and white —a dress of blue velvet relieved by trimmings of white silk. In one hand she held a priceless fan; the other white and jeweled hand lay upon the table.

Her lovely face grew white even to the lips as Eve and Felix entered the gorgeous room, but she advanced to meet them; she took Eve's hands in her own, and looked at Felix.

"I am so glad to see you. It was kind of you to come. I longed to see you both before I went away. Sit down and

talk to me—tell me all about Lilford. I shall never see it again."

Very soon Eve had told her all she knew, and then, as Lilford—to her—meant the baby, she entered into a description of his charms. Was she mistaken, or did she really see tears shining in the proud eyes?

"I am so glad you have a little son, Felix. I hope he will grow up like you, as good, as true, and as noble." Then Violet's face flushed, and she bent her proud charming head before them. "I may never see you again," she said; "let me say out to you all the thoughts that are in my heart. I am glad that you are married. I am glad, Eve, that Felix has found comfort in your love; love him always, love him truly, love him well; and—oh, believe me, Eve!—if you have little daughters, teach them that life holds no treasure like love, that wealth, fame, titles, honors, are the shadow, love the substance."

"I shall be sure to teach them so, for I believe it," remarked sweet, wise Eve.

"I was always weaker than a woman," declared Violet, with a proud, sad smile. "I flung a treasure from me and lost it. Now I have everything that in my wildest dreams I ever longed for. I wear a coronet; the world lies at my feet, and with it all, when I wake sometimes my pillow is wet with tears, for my heart is lonely, and will be lonely until I die. Still I have made my own choice."

Felix saw a beautiful Sevres vase on the table near which she stood; it held a spray of lilac.

"You retain your love for the old home-flowers," he said.

She took the lilac from the vase, and held it to her lips.

"I keep them near me always," she said, "when they are in bloom. Do you remember the lilac bushes at home, Felix?"

Yes, he remembered them—and how he had suffered the bitterness of death while the wet branches waved above his head.

Then she asked some questions about their home and their home life.

"You are very happy," she said. "Tell me that; it will be the pleasantest thing I can hear."

"Yes," replied Felix, "we are very happy."

She drew a costly ring from her finger.

"Eve," she said, "wear this for my sake—it would grieve me so much if you refused. Now put your arms around my neck—you, the true wife of a true man—and kiss me.

Say 'Good-by, Violet.' I never hear my own name now, and I am tired of titles."

Felix held her hand one minute in his own.

"Good-by," she said. "In the midst of your happy life do not quite forget me; try to remember me as you knew me years ago—not as you know me now."

And they went away, leaving her, in the midst of her desolate splendor, with the spray of lilac in her hand.

[THE END.]

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